

ZETA MINOR



THE DOCTOR AND THE ENTERPRISE
BY JEAN AIREY

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The alien sound seemed to pierce Kirk's ears. He stopped, alone in the corridor, trying to pinpoint its origin.

The transporter room.

He turned and ran towards the door as the klaxon alarm of a Red Alert sounded. Damn! he thought. It seemed that the Enterprise could not even make the final trip back to Earth after completing her five-year mission without complications. First an emergency rescue of a Cultural Survey and Contact team and the crew of the liner that had been transporting them, then a freak magnetic storm that had buffeted the ship unmercifully and taken out the subspace radio, and now. . .

As he entered the room, Lt. Kyle was staring at a large boxlike structure that stood on several of the transporter pads. It was about eight feet tall with small opaqued windows at the top, a white light on the roof that was rotating slowly, and lettering above the windows that said 'POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX'.

"Report, Lieutenant."

"It just appeared, sir."

"The transporter wasn't activitated?"

"No, sir. We were performing signaling tests, but it was not activated."

The door at the front of the box started to open. Both Kirk and Kyle had their phasers out as a man emerged.

Over six feet tall, he was wearing a heavy coat over clothing that reminded Kirk of the earth styles of the 1890s. A long scarf was wrapped around his neck, hanging down in front on both sides to the floor. A floppy hat partially covered an abundance of brown curly hair. His blue eyes seemed to focus suddenly on Kirk and Kyle. One cheek looked bruised, and he swayed slightly.

"Oh bother," he said with a decided British accent, "this isn't London."

"Just stand there and keep your hands where we can see them," Kirk said. He did not seem to be a menace, but Kirk had seen his ship threatened too often to take any chances.

"No need to panic." The man raised his hands slowly and eyed the phasers as if he recognized them.

The door behind Kirk opened, and two security guards took positions on the right and left while McCoy and Spock came over to Kirk.

"Captain?" Spock already had his tricorder going.

"The box materialized in that position - and he -" Kirk motioned with his head to the stranger who was watching the proceedings with curiosity, "came out of it. He hasn't made any hostile moves. Oh, Spock, the transporter wasn't activitated."

The stranger eyed the assembly as if he were accustomed to weighing the odds against him. Kirk did not miss that look. In spite of the stranger's unimpressive appearance, he felt uneasy. He could hear the combined tricorders of Spock and McCoy humming behind him.

"Spock?"

"The - box - would seem to be a representation of a middle twentieth century English Police Call box. However, there are some anomalies. . ."

"He's not human, Jim." McCoy interrupted.

"Captain," said Spock, "I am getting some unusual readings from inside the device."

As Kirk was realizing that the 'box' had now become a 'device', the stranger moved quickly towards its door. The security guards fired instantly, but he still managed to close the door as he fell, collapsing on the transporter step.

"Kyle, see if you can get that door open. Spock, is he armed?"

Kyle moved up to the door of the device, but the door would not open. Spock was carefully analyzing his tricorder readings. "Captain, the pockets of his coat are filled with a great many objects. I am unable to ascertain if any of these might be some type of weapon."

"Empty his pockets." Kirk ordered one of the security guards.

"Captain, in view of the quantity of items present, it might be more expedient to remove the garment." Kirk nodded and the security guards moved to comply. As the security guards were removing the coat and jacket, one of them let the unconscious body slip slightly. Spock caught the head just before it hit the floor again.

He stiffened suddenly as the contact was made, his head snapping up and his eyes abruptly glazing. It took a moment before Kirk realized that somehow, without willing it, Spock had mind-melded with the alien.

"Spock!" Kirk moved quickly and tore Spock's hands from their grip, letting the alien's head fall back to the floor. "Are you all right?"

Spock's eyes remained glazed for a second and then he responded, "Quite all right, Captain."

"What happened?"

"He has - unusual - psychic abilities. Unconscious - I unwittingly established the mind-meld."

"What did you find out?"

Spock looked at Kirk reproachfully. "Captain, the mind-meld was made accidentally." Kirk realized that Spock had in some way violated his sense of ethics by entering the meld, and now Kirk was compounding the situation by asking questions.

"Does he present a danger to the ship?" Surely Spock could at least answer that.

"No, Captain, he does not." Spock seemed to have retreated behind the thickest wall of Vulcan reserve.

"Bones, what is he?"

"Nothing I've ever seen or heard of before." McCoy moved closer to the unconscious body, clad now in a white shirt, vest, pants, boots, and with the long multicolored scarf still wrapped around its neck. "He has a double circulatory system, - not like Spock's, literally two hearts, one on each side of his chest, some kind of a double breathing system, body temperature 17⁰, blood pressure almost nonexistent. I can't tell you what he is, Jim, but even his response to the phaser fire was abnormal - he was still conscious as he fell. As a matter of fact, I believe he may have sustained some type of head injury." McCoy ran the medical tricorder over the stranger's head again. "He did - but it looks like it's an aggravation of a recent previous injury. And that's unusual - his skull is very thick, so what could have caused the original injury. . ."

"How long will he remain unconscious?"

"Jim, I can't say - longer than normal, with a combination of two phaser stuns and at the very least a severe concussion."

"Doctor," said Spock, "your ability as a prognostician would seem to leave something to be desired."

Kirk and McCoy looked at the stranger. His eyes were open, and he was very apparently conscious.

"Gentlemen," he said, eyeing the security guards as they moved back into their 'alert' position. "Don't you think that some two sided conversation might be more informative than your one sided version?" He smiled, as if finding their reactions deeply funny.

Kirk noticed with surprise that the security guards were relaxing. "Do you feel well enough to talk to us?"

"Yes, of course. I love to talk - if you are willing to talk and not shoot. I really hate stun guns."

Glancing at McCoy and Spock and receiving an answering shrug of shoulders and a tilted eyebrow, Kirk turned back to the stranger and said, "We can talk in one of our briefing rooms." The stranger got up slowly, accepting McCoy's help. "Kyle," said Kirk, "come with us. Spock, have you been able to clear up that subspace communication problem yet?"

"No, Captain, the fault is not in the computer scanning system. Lt. Uhura and Commander Scott are continuing to work on it."

"I want to be informed as soon as anything is found out about what caused it - and I want it fixed."

"Yes sir." Spock turned to relay the order to the bridge, informing them that the Captain could be reached in briefing room 4 at the Transporter level.

The security guards moved to either side of the man. He glanced at them and then over to Kirk. "Do you consider me so dangerous?"

"I have seen danger come to my ship in many forms - I prefer not to take chances." In spite of Spock's statement, Kirk was not ready to relax his guard. Their eyes locked, and the stranger smiled in amusement again. Kirk's eyes narrowed and then, suddenly returning the smile, he motioned the guards away. "Kyle, keep your phaser ready."

"A compromise - a very judicious choice."

"What is your name?" asked Kirk.

"Oh, I'm the Doctor."

"The Doctor?" said Kirk as the group left the room.

"Doctor who?" asked McCoy.

"That's right," said the Doctor, beaming at McCoy. McCoy looked baffled.

"Doctor McCoy," said Spock, "I believe that the 'name' was 'The Doctor' - and I should assume that it is in the nature of a title, and can be most appropriately used without any surname. However, the Doctor apparently is accustomed to the human desire to attach at least two names to all sentient beings. If you wish to use a duonomen form of address, he would not object if you refer to him as Doctor Who."

The Doctor had been listening to Spock with an infectious smile impossibly growing on his face and Kirk began smiling too. Somehow an individual who could appreciate Spock at his most precise did not seem to be a threat to the Enterprise.

They went into the briefing room and sat down. The Doctor was looking at Spock closely. "You're not human either?"

"I am a Vulcan."

"Vulcan? From a planet called Vulcan?"

An eyebrow raised. "Yes. Do you know of it?"

"From somewhere - I'll think of it."

"Well, Doctor," said Kirk, "you must realize that the first question that we need answered is, what are you doing here?"

"I don't know." The Doctor grinned as Kirk winced.

"You mean that you did not control the method of your arrival on this ship?" asked Spock.

"Exactly. I was expecting the TARDIS to return to London - in June of 1980, and instead she materialized here."

"Is the TARDIS the device in the Transporter room?"

"Yes. Ever since I've been using her she doesn't always go where I expect her to - and I can certainly assure you that I was not expecting to arrive on your ship."

"What planet are you from originally?" asked Kirk, hoping to get a simple answer that might help solve the mystery.

"Gallifrey."

"Spock?" Kirk had never heard of it, but that did not mean that it did not exist.

"No record of any planet by that name." Spock looked up from the science computer viewer.

The Doctor was studying Spock intently. Under his breath, Kirk could hear him mutter "Vaksh, Vogan, Voord, Vulcan!" He turned to Kirk suddenly.

"What year is this - Earth time - say, since 1980?"

"224 years."

The Doctor looked puzzled. "Captain, it would seem that we both have something of an enigma on our hands. You have me, and I have a Vulcan surviving centuries after his race - and his planet - was utterly destroyed in a massive civil war." Spock turned and stared at him.

"Parallel Universes," said Kirk.

"You are familiar with the theory?"

"I - we - have experienced the phenomenon before."

"Can you give me the coordinates of your planet?" Spock asked.

The Doctor could. Spock entered them into the computer and looked at the response with resignation. "That planetary system was destroyed when its sun became a red giant 140,000 years ago."

"So my people do not exist in your universe."

"It would seem unlikely. There are very few intelligent, spacetravelling races that are completely unknown, and the Doctor - Doctor McCoy - has no record of any race of your type. What do you call yourselves?"

"Time Lords."

Spock's eyebrow raised, but Kirk decided to interrupt before his first officer's curiosity could be indulged further. "It would seem that what we need to do is to find out how to return you to your own universe."

"No, Captain, I think that the first thing we must find out is whose universe we are in now."

The intercom beeped. "Bridge to Captain Kirk."

"Kirk here."

"Sulu here, Captain. We've got what appears to be a large group of ships just within scanner range."

"Is the subspace radio fixed?"

"No sir. We have not been able to obtain any transmissions on any standard starfleet frequencies."

"I'll be right up."

Kirk turned to the Doctor who had been listening to the conversation with a curious mixture of interest and amusement. "Doctor, would you care to join us? This might prove to be the answer to your question."

"I'd be delighted."

McCoy scowled. "Jim, I don't think that the Doctor should be moving around too much until I can tell -"

"Oh, I'm quite all right - really. I've almost gotten used to being stunned by something or another." The Doctor smiled at McCoy.

"I would suggest that, given the circumstances, the Doctor's presence on the bridge could prove of some benefit." Spock interjected.

"Very well, then, the Doctor will join us. Kyle, record your report on this and then you're off duty. I want all other transporter personnel alerted in case we acquire any other visitors."

On their way to the bridge, Kirk noticed that the Doctor took in the usual sights and sounds of the starship with interest but without amazement. He seemed to note with somewhat increased interest the presence of two Andorrians - commenting to Spock - "So you have other alien species in the crew." Spock did not seem to think that the remark was worthy of response, but Kirk observed that the Doctor found Spock's lack of response an apparent cause for thought. His only other comment came when they got into the turbolift system and Kirk said "Bridge" causing the turbolift to begin its usual forward and upward motion.

"Voice controlled?" Kirk nodded. "How convenient."

"We find it so," said Spock.

"A logical approach?" said the Doctor smiling at Spock and, surprisingly, winking at Kirk. Spock did not respond, which seemed to afford the Doctor more amusement. Kirk began to wonder if the Doctor pictured himself as some sort of intergalactic comedian.

The door opened on the bridge and Kirk moved to the navigational console.

"How close are those ships?"

"I can pick them up on visual scanning now, sir," said Sulu, adjusting the controls.

"Put it on the screen - highest magnification."

"Yes sir."

A swarm of small ships came into view. Globe-like, they seemed to fill the viewscreen like dozens of small stars. Kirk heard the Doctor take a deep breath. "Identification?"

Spock was checking the readings at the Science Station. "Type of ship unknown to our computers, some type of alien lifeform within - also unknown."

"Captain," said the Doctor, stepping down beside Kirk. "It's my universe, and I would suggest that you move away from those ships as rapidly as possible."

All traces of the comedian had left. "Why?" Kirk asked.

"They're Sontaran - freight and shipping vessels from the look of them and the number, but they usually have some armed escorts." He glanced around the Bridge, taking in the assorted personnel, seeming to weigh their experience and the possible reception of what he was saying. Having apparently made some kind of a decision, he continued.

"Have you ever met a race whose greatest joy was to enslave other people? To conquer, kill, torture and maim - often for the joy it brings them? Who value their own individual lives as nothing - and the lives of other races as less than that?" By now the Doctor was speaking with a seriousness that surprised and impressed Kirk with its deadly concentration. Indeed, the Doctor seemed to have lost the concern for his 'audience' and was speaking almost to himself. Kirk glanced around the rest of the Bridge. All of the crew had been listening intently, their attention completely on the Doctor. Even Uhura and Scotty had crawled out from under the communications panel where they had been working. As the Doctor finished speaking, eyes moved to the viewing screen where the alien vessels were growing larger. That the Doctor was sincere Kirk could not question, that in some situations discretion was the better part of valor he had never doubted.

"We've run into people like that. Spock - get as much information as you can from the scanners. Sulu, warp six 180° out of here. Uhura, Scotty, you can stop working on that radio. Start scanning for any communications on bands outside the Starfleet band, they apparently don't use that high a range here."

The Doctor was smiling again as Kirk finished. "Well, Captain, you and your crew are certainly both quick and efficient." He glanced around with approval at the organized effort going on on the Bridge.

"Doctor," said Kirk, "I think that you and I need to have a talk."

"But of course - at your convenience." The Doctor leaned casually against the bridge rail and smiled at Kirk as though he were in complete control of an ordinary situation.

With a feeling of exasperation, Kirk turned to Spock. "Have you been . . ." He heard a crash behind him and as he turned around saw that the Doctor had collapsed and McCoy was bending over him. "Bones?"

"Cerebrovascular hemmorage - we'd better get him down to sickbay."

"Go ahead."

McCoy was calling for the sickbay team when Spock turned to Kirk.

"Captain, armed vessels from that fleet were attempting to pursue us. We have outdistanced them. However, long range scanners indicate similar vessels throughout this area."

"How long can we maintain evasive action?"

"Difficult to say, Captain. We have no familiarity with these ships or their capabilities. If this is indeed a parallel universe, we cannot even determine with certainty where we could go in relative safety until we can effect our return."

"In other words, we need the Doctor."

"If he does possess the knowledge he claims, and if he is willing to assist us - then yes, we need him."

The sickbay team was removing their patient. Kirk looked at the unconscious form.

"Scotty, you have the con. Keep us clear of any involvement with anything. Spock and I'll be in sickbay. If I can get any more information from the Doctor, I'll tell you."

Down in sickbay, McCoy scowled at the indicators over the bed where the Doctor lay.

"How bad is it?" asked Kirk, concerned that the only source of information about this alternate universe would be unavailable to them.



"Jim, I don't know what normal is for him - so I can't tell how badly the hemorrhaging is affecting him - except that he is unconscious, and I would say that if the injury is doing that then it's very bad indeed. There seem to be previously damaged areas in that part of the brain, and while he also seems to have a remarkable healing ability, what's happening now is more than his own body mechanism can handle on its own.

"What are you going to do?"

"I suspect that, even with the damage, given time, he would recover without my doing anything."

"Bones, we don't have time." McCoy still looked unconvinced and Kirk continued his argument. "He is the only clue we have to where we are and possibly how we got here - and how we can get back in one piece. I need him conscious - and well - as soon as possible."

"Jim, there's a large blood clot between his skull and his brain. It covers quite a large area and there is active bleeding from inside the brain to that area. That clot has to come out and the bleeding stopped."

"You've treated our crew for that kind of thing before."

"I've been able to treat them medically. I know what medications I can use on our people - even Spock - mostly. I wouldn't dare use any of them on him. I have absolutely no way of determining what the possible side effects would be. The only possible thing I could do would be to operate and surgically remove the clot and cauterize the bleeding."

"Then you'll have to do that."

"Without anaesthesia? I've got the same problem with what we normally use for pain killers. Damn it, Jim, you saw that even the phasers didn't have the normal effect on him. If I use a drug, I could kill him. If I don't use one - Jim, I'm a doctor, not a butcher."

"Doctor?"

McCoy turned. The Doctor's eyes were open but were still slightly glazed. He looked at McCoy. "What's the problem?"

McCoy explained.

"Normally I could tell you what would be effective - but I don't think I'm up to that. I have been trying to get into a catatonic trance - which would enable you to operate humanly, but I suspect the area involved . . ."

McCoy nodded. "It would interfere with your ability to do that."

Kirk noticed that the Doctor's speech had become slightly blurred. It was obviously an effort for him to talk, and the pain indicator was rising higher with each effort.

"You are proposing a manual procedure." McCoy nodded. "That would seem to be the acceptable alternative."

"There is a possibility that you will not be unconscious during the operation."

"I quite understand that - but from what I saw out there - we have little time to spare."

McCoy still looked reluctant.

"Come now," he snapped impatiently, "surely you are as skillful as your own Incan physicians. The operation must be done. I would suggest that you strap..." He slipped into unconsciousness again.

"Okay Jim, we'll try it. Only pray that he stays unconscious."

"I thought the brain had no nerve endings," Kirk said.

"Yours doesn't," McCoy said grimly.

With the restraints in place and the Doctor turned on one side to expose the area for the operation, a sterile field was established and McCoy began the delicate operation.

The Doctor did not stay unconscious. As McCoy finished opening the skull, his eyes opened again. Kirk saw his hands move against the restraints. Suddenly Spock moved over and took them. The eyes of the two aliens met and something was exchanged between them.

"Sometimes it helps to have someone to hold on to." Did Kirk really hear that?

Almost an answering smile came as the Doctor's eyes closed again. But Kirk saw the pressure of the hands grasping Spock's and knew that the man remained aware of McCoy suctioning out the area. Only when the laser cauterizer was used did the hands relax again and full unconsciousness return.

"That seems to be it. Chapel, were you able to make a repair patch from those skull fragments?"

"Yes, Doctor."

McCoy carefully molded the 'patch' into place. Only a small area of bone had been removed and the patch, made from the patient's own tissue and bone, would rapidly fuse the open area with as much protection as the original. "Jim, I think we did it." McCoy looked at the indicators carefully. "Pain is down, both hearts in sinus rhythm, blood pressure stable, alpha rhythm flowing. Was he conscious at all?"

"Yes."

"Damn. I still feel like a butcher having to operate like that."

"Not at all, Doctor," came the voice from the bed. "It was a very well done job and I thank you." The Doctor looked as though he was going to get up as soon as Chapel finished removing the restraints.

"You stay right there," barked McCoy.

"But Doctor McCoy," the Doctor said in a hurt/injured tone, "I feel very well now and there are things . . ."

"Don't tell me how you feel. You're staying there for at least another 24 hours - and if I have to keep the restraints on you, I will."

The Doctor's gaze and McCoy's clashed. The Doctor raised himself to a half-sitting position and McCoy moved forward. Kirk looked at the indicators; they were starting to move again. Spock stepped between the Doctor and McCoy. "Doctor, I would suggest that you follow Doctor McCoy's prescription. I do not think that the time need be wasted. We can provide you with a tie-in to the library computer from here. If you are going to help us, you will need to know quite a bit more about us." McCoy glared at Spock.

"Bones," Kirk said, "you know that he isn't just going to lie there."

"Very well," McCoy turned back to his patient. "But you're not to get up."

"Agreed - Bones," and traces of the old smile appeared as the Doctor lay back. Spock started toward the door. "Oh, and Spock," Spock turned back and looked at the Doctor questioningly. "Thank you. I have not often come upon a gesture made as appropriately and as willingly." Without waiting for a reply the Doctor turned and smiled at Nurse Chapel. "Do you have a listing ..."

"Nurse Chapel," McCoy interrupted. "I want the biolab to do a full analysis on him. And Doctor, before you start playing around with the computer, you tell Chapel all about your medical history. If you're going to be around here I want to know how to treat you."

For a moment Kirk thought that Spock was going to make another remark, but he turned and went out the door.

"Bones," from the grin on the Doctor's face, Kirk suspected that he was about to say something that would provoke a reaction from McCoy. "Do you really think it essential to have all my medical history? I'm 749 years old, and as charming as Nurse Chapel is, that might take more time ..."

"If you could restrain yourself to the pertinent facts, I think that the time will be sufficient. I'm sure that in 749 years you've learned to restrain yourself when it's necessary."

Score one for McCoy, thought Kirk.

"And in the next 24 hours, I expect you to rest - or sleep - or whatever you do - for at least eight," McCoy continued.

The Doctor looked quizzical and McCoy paused.

"Six?" No response. "Four?"

"Four hours should be sufficient. At the end of my stay here, Captain, I would suggest that you and I and your chief officers get together."

Kirk had an uneasy feeling that the control of the ship had been transferred but reminded himself that the Doctor was only expressing what he himself had already decided. "As soon as McCoy says you're fit, I'll call the meeting."

Kirk and McCoy walked toward the sickbay door. "What was that last part to Spock about, Jim?"

"If the Doctor travels around alone - as he would seem to - he must often find himself fighting on his own in unpleasant situations. How old did he say he was?"

"749."

"Spock should find that. . ."

"Fascinating!"

As Kirk entered the Bridge, Spock got up from the command chair.

"Report, Spock?"

"We seem to have outdistanced the Sontaran fleet. However, scanners indicate considerable activity in most of the space in this area. We have been following a path which would seem to lead to an area of comparative inactivity. When the Doctor recovers - "

"We can expect the Doctor to be available to us in 24 hours. Until then, we will simply have to avoid making any sort of contact with the ships and people in this universe."

"Captain," said Uhura, "I am now able to receive transmissions from vessels in the area. We are unable to translate them coherently, however."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Let me know as soon as possible when we can tell what they're talking about. I want all senior officers in briefing room 2 in one hour."

"Yes, sir." Uhura turned back to her communications panel.

Inside the briefing room, Kirk looked around at the officers already gathered. McCoy was late, and they were waiting for him.

For five years I've been with this crew through all sorts of adventures - bizarre and commonplace, he thought. I've lost 92 crewmen, and for all my command experience, I'll never accept those deaths as being necessary. This ship and its crew is my life, and whatever it takes, I'll see that they get back to their own universe. It's part of my mission, my responsibility. No glory in doing that, it's part of the job. And when it's completed? He decided not to try to guess what Starfleet would do then. Anyway, McCoy had arrived and they could get working on the current problem.

"Sorry I'm late, Jim," McCoy said as he came in and sat down at the briefing table. "I finally managed to get my patient settled."

"Was there much of a problem?"

"Not much more than I'm used to," McCoy looked at Kirk and Spock accusingly. "Although I must say that you two don't generally involve Chapel with fantastic tales of wild adventures, persuade the Medical staff - and all my other patients to join in a feast of jellybabies. . ."

"Jellybabies?" asked Kirk.

"Some kind of candy about two centimeters long, shaped like a swaddled infant, and they come in assorted flavors. He seems to have an infinite supply and he's got everyone in sickbay munching on them. In between passing out candy and talking to Chris, he's been running through the data on the library computer - at fast speed. I finally had to tell him that I'd put him in isolation with no computer before he agreed to rest."

"Will he be able to talk to us tomorrow?"

"Yes. Although if he disrupts my sickbay much more, I might let you have him earlier."

"If I might make a suggestion, Captain," Spock said.

"I think that both Doctor McCoy and I would welcome it, Spock."

"When we rescued the passengers and crew of the liner Crotone, there was a Cultural Survey and Contact team on board." Kirk nodded. CS&C was a recently created specialized division in Starfleet. They had their own chain of command, but while on his ship they were under him. Since the rescue, they had been quite helpful in keeping the Crotone crew and passengers out of his own crew's way. The addition of some 250 'passengers' stretched the Enterprise's normal resources to an uncomfortable limit.

"Do you think they can help us, Spock?"

"The Lieutenant who is in charge of the team has an exemplary record in initial survey expeditions and on this last expedition has been credited by the other members of the team with enabling them to be retrieved by the Crotone after their Captain was killed. Since we have a member of a new culture on board, it would seem logical to assign her to 'study' him."

"What's her background, Spock?" McCoy asked.

"She has a PhD in Xenobiology and is also a certified paramedical technician."

"Well, I'd certainly be glad to have her assigned to him." McCoy said. "What's her name?"

"Stephans, Lt. Dorcy Stephans," Kirk answered. "As soon as we're through here, I'll notify her of her new assignment."

McCoy nodded with relief. "The sooner the better."

"Now, if we could come to the main concern of this meeting? Scotty, what is the current damage report?"

"We had some minor problems immediately after that storm, mostly caused by the vibration. They've all been checked and cleared. But there seems to be something going off balance in the matter-antimatter mix when we're at warp speed. As long as we stay at warp speed, I can't try to clear it up."

"You want to go to impulse power?"

"Aye, Captain."

"Spock, is there any sign of an enemy vessel in scanning range?"

"Negative, Captain. We are presently in an area of space which shows no signs of any lifeform activity."

"Very well, Scotty, cut back to impulse power, but remember that we could have to cut in warp drive on short notice."

"Aye. We'll leave an emergency cutin - but we still won't be able to tolerate high warp speed until we find the main trouble."

"Captain," Spock said, "we also have another problem with the computer control to engineering life support."

"I thought that was all in a separate system with full emergency backup? Wasn't that what we just had installed?"

"We now have an independent primary control and a secondary control which is a complete duplicate of the first. We also have a tertiary system which can provide up to two hours of full support. During the storm, the ROMs on the primary control were erased. It will take 35 hours to reprogram and reinstall them on the primary system."

"Then we're running on the secondary system with the tertiary as the backup."

"Exactly. However, if something happens to the secondary system, and the tertiary system exceeds its life span, a failsafe back to the main computer will start a half-hour countdown to destruct the ship."

"Now whose bright idea was that?" McCoy asked.

"It's supposed to force an organized abandonment of the ship's crew to the nearest M-type planet - with a rescue robot beacon detached, and no chance of the ship falling into the 'wrong hands'." Kirk smiled at McCoy. "Starfleet is apparently discouraging heroics."

"But Jim, we don't even have enough spacesuits or evacuation equipment for everyone now - with the people from the Crotone on board." McCoy said in concern.

"And there are no M-type planets within transporter range," Spock added.

"And what good would a robot beacon do us here?" McCoy continued.

"Gentlemen, aren't we looking at the worst possible circumstances?" Kirk said. "In 35 hours we'll have the primary system back up, by then Scotty will have us underway at full warp power, and in only 24 hours the Doctor will be able to at least guide us around this universe in safety. We should have ample time to figure out how to get back to our own universe. All we have to do is to stay out of trouble for a very short while."

"Aye, Captain," Scotty said, "it would be a mighty strange set of circumstances that would get us into trouble again that quick." He stopped and thought for a moment. "But Captain, do you really think that we can trust the Doctor?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, he's an alien. His travelling device is of a type we've never heard of. We dinna know anything about him - but he seemed to assume that we'd both be on the same side against a bunch of people like the Sontarans. He seems to have had considerable experience in dealin' with humans - but we dinna know how he got it."

"What makes you assume that he has had such extensive contact with humans?" Spock asked.

"Well, Mr. Spock, it might not be your kind of logic, but it seems to me that anyone who can accept the fact that the natural reaction of a security guard would be to shoot has got to have been around humans for quite a while."

Kirk looked at Spock who nodded in agreement. He knew better than to ask Spock outright how far he felt the Doctor should be trusted. But he knew enough of his first officer. . . "We've given him complete access to the library computer. In spite of his disruption of sickbay, he seems to be as concerned with our situation as we are."

Scott nodded. "It canna be denied that we'll need all the help we can get to get back to our own universe in one piece."

"And if we're going to do that, Mr. Scott, we'd better get to work on what we know we have to do. Meeting dismissed."

As the group got up to leave, Spock walked over to Kirk. "Incidentally, Captain, I could not help but notice that at times the Doctor seems to have a very charismatic effect on humans."

"I had noticed that too - but I don't think that it's going to become a problem." Spock turned to leave. "Oh Spock, did you hear how old he is?"

Spock turned back, an eyebrow raised. "Indeed, Captain, and have you determined what his total life span would be?"

"No, but. . ."

"I would venture to say that he is still quite young according to his present age measured against the normal longevity of his race."

Kirk stared at Spock's departing back and shook his head in amazement. If Spock was right, and the Doctor was still 'young', perhaps that explained the seemingly inappropriate bursts of humor. Maybe all Time Lords went through this stage before stabilizing into serious adults. At least he did not seem to demonstrate the childlike cruelty that Trelaine had. Somehow Kirk felt that his reasoning might not be completely correct, but it was a comforting thought. All he needed on the ship at this time was a comedian, and an alien one at that.

In the briefing room the next day, Kirk, Spock, Scott and Lt. Dorcy Stephans waited for Dr. McCoy to arrive with the Doctor. McCoy had reported that Lt. Stephans and the Doctor were working quite well together and that there had been no further major disruptions in sickbay.

"Kirk to bridge."

"Uhura here."

"If you pick up any significant transmissions while we are here, alert me and patch them through."

"Yes, Captain."

The door opened and the Doctor and McCoy entered. Kirk noticed that the Doctor had reacquired his overcoat, jacket, and floppy hat. Well, he thought, with such a low body temperature, the Doctor might well feel cold in the earth normal environment of the Enterprise.

"Good morning, everyone," said the Doctor blithely, taking the seat at the table opposite Kirk. Kirk noticed as he sat down that it was as if the 'head' of the table had suddenly shifted. Well, Spock had warned him. Whatever the Doctor had, it was there, it was 'natural', and it affected humans - Vulcans too? He wondered.

"Good morning, Doctor. I don't think you've been introduced to Lt. Commander Montgomery Scott."

"Chief Engineer," the Doctor responded, rising and offering his hand to Scott. Somewhat surprised, Scotty responded in kind. "And Lt. Stephans and I have been having some fascinating conversations." The Doctor smiled. The Lieutenant smiled. "And of course I am already acquainted with Mr. Spock and you, Captain." The Doctor glanced over at the Captain quizzically. "Well, Captain, could you fill me in on our present status?"

McCoy snorted. Kirk gathered that the Doctor had not been idle during his confinement in sickbay, even after the disruption had stopped. He probably knew the situation as well as anyone else.

"Spock?"

"We have been able to successfully avoid all contact with any alien vessels. This is our present position." The computer viewers glowed, indicating the Enterprise and the present star position. "In our universe, this was part of the area controlled by the Klingon Empire."

"So you don't have much information on it?"

"Very little. Are you familiar with it?"

"Yes, I've been around here before. In this time - in this universe - the Sontarans are trying to conquer this area from the Rutans."

"Our long range scanners indicate considerable vessel movement."

"Doctor," asked Kirk, "What would happen if we met up with a Sontaran fleet?"

"It would depend on how many of them there were. With your offensive and defensive weapons you could probably escape an attack of, say, 20-40 of their ships. More than that and they could destroy you." He cocked his head at Kirk.

"20-40?" queried Spock.

"I can't give you a more precise number." The Doctor smiled at Spock. "There are a significant number of random factors."

"How large are their fleets?" asked Scotty.

"It depends on what they're attacking. A massive effort and they think nothing of sending out 400."

Spock looked skeptical.

"They don't care how many may be destroyed," the Doctor went on, "they only want to win."

"Don't they value their own pilots and crews?" asked Kirk.

"Oh no, you see, they're clones."

"Clones?"

"Yes. They reproduce by cloning. So any individual life means nothing to them, and they don't think much of races who do respect individual life - especially humans."

Stephans was frowning. "But cloning would . . ."

"You must allow for the environmental factors, Lieutenant," interrupted the Doctor, leaning forward on the table. "So many are raised to be leaders, others to follow orders and die."

"Doctor," Kirk said, trying to return the attention of the conversation to the topic he felt to be of primary concern. "You must realize that our primary interest at the moment is to return to our own universe without any entanglement in yours."

"I can certainly sympathize with that." The Doctor leaned back in his chair and put his feet on the table. "If our positions were reversed, I should certainly feel the same way." He grinned.

"And a further consequence of this interest is that we do not want to do anything that might alter the course of events in this universe."

"Ah yes, I have come across that desire to be detached observers before. Your Prime Directive, I believe you call it." The group nodded. "That might not be so simple." He sat up straight again. "The Sontarans' scanners have a slightly longer range than yours, and if you have been detected, they will not choose to merely observe you. And Captain, I can also tell you this, you cannot allow your ship to fall into Sontaran hands."

"Possible effect?" asked Spock.

"With the knowledge they could gain from the engineering and weaponry of your vessel, you would enable them to conquer the galaxy quite easily." He leaned back again and glanced around the table as if weighing the quality of the people he saw.

"I see," said Kirk.

The Doctor sat suddenly upright. "As a matter of fact, you might check the activity in the area surrounding your ship - at the very edge of your scanner range."

"Spock," snapped Kirk.

"360° scanner - alien vessels at the edge of the third sector now."

"Captain," it was Sulu. "We have vessels closing in on us from the third sector. Uhura has not been able to complete translation of their transmissions."

"Red Alert, Mr. Sulu. I'm on my way. Well, Doctor, if you're right, it looks as though we'll be fighting our way out of this one." Kirk turned to leave.

"If you take a heading of 185°, Captain, you should be able to get into a relatively safe area," shouted the Doctor as Kirk passed through the door.

On the bridge Kirk found his crew alert and ready for battle. The glow of the red alert light gave an eerie highlight to the area.

"Mr. Scott, do we have warp speed?"

"I can give you up to warp 2, sir, but beyond that there is still an unstable factor in the matter-anti-matter mix."

"How fast are the Sontaran vessels, Mr. Spock?"

"Presently travelling at warp 1, Captain."

"Increase to warp 2, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye, sir."

"The Sontarans can reach the equivalent of your warp 3, Captain." Kirk looked around and saw that the Doctor had seated himself on one of the bridge steps. Wonderful, he thought, now he had a back-seat driver.

"Sontarans increasing to warp 2 also, Captain." Spock studied his science console viewer closely. "Now at warp 2.5 and gaining on us."

"Mr. Sulu, make a 180° turn and slow to warp one."

"Aye, sir."

The Enterprise turned smoothly and as she headed back toward the small globe-like ships, they scattered in front of her, eventually forming a circular pattern around her.

"Impulse power now, Mr. Sulu. How many of them are there, Spock?"

"53, Captain."

"Well, we'll let them look us over. So far they haven't done anything that is overtly hostile - let's return the favor."

"Captain, the Sontarans are not going to decide that a vessel of this size can be ignored. If you fire now, you could catch most of them by surprise." The Doctor looked quite serious. "Unless, of course, you enjoy playing sitting duck."

Kirk ignored the statement. "Chekov, arm the photon torpedoes, wide range. Sulu, set the phases for a maximum sweep. You are not to fire except on my direct order."

For several moments, it looked as though the stalemate would be indefinitely maintained. Then simultaneous bursts of fire emerged from all the Sontaran vessels. "Photon missiles have been fired at us, Captain. Time to impact, 12 seconds." Spock said.

"Sulu, Chekov, fire - NOW!"

Between the wide sweep of the torpedoes and the following burst of the phasers, most of the enemy's missiles were destroyed before they reached their target. A number did get through, however, and Kirk could hear the damage reports coming in.

"Now, Chekov, I want a series of photon torpedoes with a narrow burst directly at those ships. Sulu, set the phasers on tracking and pick up any stragglers that the torpedoes miss."

The battle strategy seemed to be working effectively as thirty-five of the small vessels fell to the coordinated offense. Some of the others, however, began moving rapidly directly toward the Enterprise. They seemed to be making no effort to fire their weapons. Their swift zig-zag motions enabled them to evade any direct hits.

"They're going to smash their ships into your shields, Captain. That will put all of their weaponry and their ships' reactors into a direct explosion on your main defense shields." The Doctor said.

"Kamikaze?" Kirk said in amazement.

"That's what you call it - they call it fighting for the glory of the glorious Sontaran Empire."

"Scotty, full power to the shields! Sulu, try reaching them before they reach us. Chekov, keep the ones still on the perimeter under full torpedo attack."

A sudden violent rocking warned Kirk that the kamikaze technique was proving effective. "Damage reports, Mr. Spock."

"That last hit was in the main power link between Engineering and secondary computer control. Exact level of damage cannot be determined. . ." Another blast rocked the ship, but Sulu and Chekov simultaneously fired their weapons and let out a yell of exultation.

"All enemy ships destroyed, Keptin."

"Very good, gentlemen. Heading 185° Mr. Sulu. Battle stations, yellow alert status. Damage reports, Lieutenant Uhura."

"Sickbay reports thirty wounded - two dead."

"Life support systems damaged further in that last attack, Captain." Scotty was regarding his display panels with dismay.

"How badly?"

"Less than 60% life support capability left."

"Captain," Spock turned from the Science console, "The computer area has also received extensive damage to the secondary life support control memory system. With the direct damage to life support itself, we have about two hours of life support left on the tertiary system.

Silence engulfed the bridge.

"How long will it take to repair?" Kirk asked.

Spock and Scott exchanged glances, then Spock spoke. "On the life support system itself, the engineering portion, about three hours, on the secondary computer memory system, about five hours.

Kirk looked over at the Doctor who was still perched on the bridge steps. "Doctor, can you get out of here in your TARDIS?"

"I could but. . ." The Doctor gave Kirk a quizzical look.

"If we cannot complete our repairs in two hours and get the secondary system back up, this ship will begin a self-destruct sequence. So I would suggest that you be prepared to leave."

"That is one alternative, Captian, but there might be another." The Doctor said calmly. "Tell me, Mr. Scott, Commander Spock, how many people would you need to complete repairs on your systems?"

Scotty thought for a moment. "About five for the life support engineering."

"And the Computer system?" The Doctor turned to Spock.

"Myself and one other - the working area is small, and most of the time would be involved in testing."

"Well then, Captain," the Doctor stepped down to stand next to Kirk's chair. "If you only had a crew of, say 8 - in three areas - I assume someone would have to control the bridge - and you could shut down all other areas completely - how long would your life support last?"

Kirk nearly made a remark about pointless questions, but there was something in the Doctor's tone of voice - "Scotty?"

"10 hours."

"So that's your answer." The Doctor exclaimed gleefully, turning around.

"Doctor." Kirk tapped him on his shoulder and waited until he was facing him again. "We have a crew of 430 - and 250 additional passengers. We do not have enough space suits for everyone."

"But my TARDIS is on board." At Kirk's blank look he hastily continued. "Put 422 of your crew - and your passengers - inside her, and the rest should be able to pilot your ship and make the necessary repairs."

Kirk took a deep breath before speaking. "Doctor, are you trying to tell me that that box of yours can hold over 600 people?"

"She's quite a bit bigger on the inside than it would seem from the outside. She'll hold your people - and she has her own life support."

"Captain," Spock had been doing some calculations. "The time to evacuate to the TARDIS would require full life support for the major part of the time. Estimating that against the repair time shows that we will have total oxygen depletion one hour before repairs could be completed."

"Spock - you require less oxygen than a human." The Doctor stated.

"Spock nodded.

"Mr. Scott - do any of your engineers have a similar ability?"

"Aye, three of them."

"And I can manage quite comfortably with less life support than you presently provide." The Doctor turned to Kirk. "And you do have enough space suits for the humans involved?"

Spock turned back to the computer. The Doctor smiled at Kirk.

"Spock?"

"The Doctor's caculations are correct, Captain. The time margin would be sufficient." He looked at the Doctor. "You would be assisting me?"

"I am somewhat familiar with computer systems."

Kirk turned to Uhura. There seemed to be no doubt that the command decision had been made and he was simply to enforce it. "Order all crew and passengers except Mr. Scott's engineers to follow evacuation order 5 - using Transporter Room 2." He turned back to the Doctor. "Doctor, if you will open your TARDIS, we will proceed."

When they arrived at the TARDIS, they found McCoy waiting.

"You will be taking your injured in first?" The Doctor asked.

"Yes," McCoy looked skeptically at the box. "If you're sure there's room."

"Oh yes, quite enough." The Doctor opened the door and led Kirk and McCoy into what seemed to be a very modern control room. Kirk looked around with amazement. The room was well over twice the size of the box they had entered and several doors indicated even more rooms beyond.

"Now, Dr. McCoy, if you go through that door and turn right and then right again, there is an area which you will find suitable for caring for your people while we fix your ship."

He turned back to Kirk and Spock who were looking at the large six-sided control panel in the center of the room.

"Fascinating," said Spock, circling the device. "I should like to discuss its principles and functions with you sometime, Doctor."

"Well, the TARDIS usually does what I want her to." Kirk had a feeling that Spock was not going to be able to satisfy his curiosity about this device very easily. "Why don't you start on the computer repairs, and I'll join you shortly."

"A logical suggestion." Spock turned and left.

"Curious little devil, isn't he," commented the Doctor to Kirk. He apparently accepted Kirk's silence as agreement as he went on. "Now, Captain, I assume that there will be some time to evacuate those of us left after you begin your self-destruct sequence?"

"There should be."

"In case there isn't - who of your crew members could quickly learn some of these" - he motioned toward the button and lever studded panels. "To remove the TARDIS and the passengers in it to safety?"

Kirk smiled. The Doctor knew that he would be the one remaining on the bridge until the last minute. "Lieutenant Sulu."

"Your helmsman - very good. If you would get him down here."

Kirk opened his communicator. "Sulu, come down to the transporter troom."

"Yes sir."

McCoy appeared at the door looking stunned. "Amazing - there's a whole city in here."

"Not quite, Bones, but it will serve your needs. I would suggest that you begin your evacuation." The Doctor stepped over to the control panels and began setting some of the controls. Kirk and McCoy exchanged glances. It was clear from the Doctor's manner that he was accustomed to people being amazed at his ship - and was delighted in that same amazement.

The evacuation began in an orderly fashion. After the injured had been moved in the rest of the crew started to come. Lt. Stephens was the first inside and the Doctor turned away from the controls.

"Oh, Dorcy - if you would lead the rest of this group down the stairs, turn left, then right, and left and right, there is an area that you all should find satisfactory. Please help

yourselves to the food supplies, you may have a long wait."

Lt. Stephens look at Kirk who nodded. "Very well Doctor."

When Lt. Sulu came in the Doctor was standing back from the controls apparently satisfied with what he had done.

"Lieutenant Sulu." The Doctor motioned Sulu over to stand next to him. "I have preset the controls so that you can use these." He motioned to an array of buttons and a single lever in one of the control panel sections. "If you should have to remove the TARDIS from here, just push these controls, and then this lever. Understood?"

"Yes sir."

"I have programmed the TARDIS to land on a small Earth-type planet. You should be able to handle yourselves there."

"Sulu," Kirk said.

"Yes sir."

"If we do not make it back you are to follow the Doctor's orders explicitly. Keep your communicator handy and I will inform you if you are to - leave."

"Yes sir. Good luck, Captain."

"Thank you Lieutenant."

Kirk watched as the crew continued to file past and down the stairs. He could hear laughter coming from the lower level.

"Well, Doctor, I suggest that we get to work."

"My sentiments exactly."

On the Bridge, seated in the helmsman's position, wearing the new X-E life support suit, Kirk had the feeling that he was piloting a ghost ship. Behind him he could hear Uhura moving around as she systematically shut down life support as areas of the ship were vacated.

"All areas evacuated, sir. Life Support shut down except in engineering, computer memory control and on the Bridge."

"Have you picked up any transmissions?"

"No sir."

"Very well. Go down to the TARDIS, Lieutenant. After you leave I'll shut off life support here."

With Uhura gone, the 'ghost ship' feeling became even more oppressive. In an effort to dispell it, he called Scotty to check on how the repairs were going. Scotty informed him that his crew was progressing 'as well as might be expected' and from the tone of his voice, Kirk knew that any further interruptions would not be welcomed.

He had heard nothing from Spock and the Doctor. Neither one would be inclined to report until something decisive had happened, and, even more so than Scotty, would resent 'unnecessary interruptions'. Kirk decided that he could just open the communication link to the Computer Memory area. If he couldn't be there, at least he could hear what was going on.

"Are you ready to retest this bank again?" Spock's voice, as calm as if this were a routine maintenance check.

"Quite ready."

"Running the diagnostic program now. It should complete a successful pass in five minutes."

"Or fail in less."

"Exactly." Spock paused for a moment. "Doctor, why did you leave your people and go to Earth?"

"What makes you think I did that?"

"While you were unconscious in the Transporter room, I inadvertently entered into a mind meld with you. That information was there."

"You're a touch-telepath?"

"Yes. I must apologize. . ."

"Oh nonsense, don't bother. I've had my mind invaded by far more nasty beings. Why did I choose Earth? Well, I like Earth people - compared to most of the other races I've met."

"They are a most emotional race."

"Do you think so? They're certainly not as emotional or as illogical as some I've met. They're a bloody nuisance at times and quite indomitable - they can also cause more trouble than almost any other race if you let them get started. Of course, things may be different in your universe, but what I like about the people from Earth is that by and large they care."

"Is caring such an important thing to you?"



"Yes, when it means that the people can reach outside themselves to care for others -and especially for others not of their own species - that's extremely rare. And, somewhat surprisingly, Earth people can quite astonish you and do just that."

"And what of your own people?"

"They stopped caring about anything a long time ago - so I left."

"Did your people agree with your leaving?"

Kirk suddenly had the feeling that he was listening to a bi-level conversation. Was Spock trying to interrogate the Doctor - or the Doctor, Spock?

"Oh no. I - borrowed - the TARDIS and then they caught me and exiled me on Earth. Until they needed me."

"Needed you?"

"Well, they were determined not to interfere - but when you know what is going to happen, interference is sometimes needed. So I helped them out."

"And now?"

"Well, I could go back to Gallifrey, settle down, take my place on the Council, even teach in the Academy - but I'm not ready for that. There still seems to be so much more to learn. Whatever a professor might say, you don't learn - especially about yourself - in the Ivory Tower." The Doctor paused. "What about you?"

"Me?" Kirk could almost see the uplifted eyebrow.

"Yes, you. You know, one of the reasons I left was because of Vulcan. When the Time Lords did not interfere, I felt that a very valuable people had been lost - needlessly. I am very glad to see that my supposition was correct. Although I should not base my decision on you alone. You're half human."

"I am Vulcan."

"You mean that you've chosen the Vulcan way over the Human way when you had to - I know that much about you at least - apparently the mind meld worked two ways. Why weren't you allowed to become the best of both worlds - instead of having to choose one over the other?"

"It is not possible to be both Vulcan and Human."

"Has anyone ever tried before? I suspect that you may be . . . is that board supposed to be smoking?"

Spock muttered something that Kirk couldn't catch. "Powering down. There must be more trouble here than our first analysis showed."

If the person who did your last maintenance servicing had used the right servo-fuse, that power surge wouldn't have affected this area at all."

"It is unfortunately a common human characteristic to use the most expedient way and avoid the difficulty of the required way."

"Surely a characteristic not limited to humans."

A pause. "Agreed."

"That board looks pretty bad. Do you have another replacement?"

"We have no more spare memory storage modules of this type."

"Spare parts, then?"

"There is a bench testing system over there and spare parts are available. The new memory bubble domes will also have to be reprogramed."

"I'll start on it now."

Kirk turned off the intercom link and analysed the conversation carefully. While not an expert in the hardware maintenance of the Enterprise's computer system, he did have enough basic knowledge to realize what had happened. During their last scheduled maintenance,

someone had used the wrong servo-fuse in the secondary life support memory control. The 'new' fuse was unable to prevent a power surge from coming through and damaging what had at first appeared to be the three boards that Spock had identified. The Enterprise carried a number of spare boards for the computer system, but not an infinite supply.

Apparently additional damage done by the power surge had resulted in what would be a longer repair time than Spock had originally estimated. He looked at the chronometer. Half an hour left before the tertiary system would begin the self-destruct sequence.

The intercom sounded.

"Kirk here."

"Repairs completed in engineering, Captain. Waiting for computer control."

"Very good, Mr. Scott. Computer Control is not yet repaired. Can you handle things down there when it is?"

"Aye, Captain."

"Then send the rest of your people to the TARDIS. They'll have to wear X-E suits until they get there. Kirk to Spock."

"Spock here, Captain."

"Scotty reports engineering repairs completed. What is your estimated time for repair of the computer system?"

"Previously undetermined damage to the backplane area has necessitated rebuilding one of the spare memory boards that was damaged. I am about to replace the backplane now. Repairs should be completed in fifteen minutes."

Fourteen minutes later Spock's voice came over the intercom. "Diagnostic test on computer systems successfully completed, Captain. Bringing up memory systems to engineering."

"Mr. Scott, Mr. Spock is bringing up your computer memory system."

"Well, if he is, Captain, there's nae anything on the asynchronous signal interface monitor."

"Spock, did you hear that?"

"Affirmative, Captain. There appears to be an additional problem. We are investigating."

Kirk could hear the sound of someone whistling in the background as Spock was speaking. He wondered what the hell the Doctor could find to whistle about.

"Spock," the Doctor said, "Look at this."

"The drivers on the fiber optic bus cable?"

"Looks like they were hit in the power surge too. What's your replacement procedure for them?"

"Difficult. We have to run a new bus cable over to engineering through the inside conduits of the ship."

"You don't use a cable connector?"

"Not with this cable. The bus bars get hung too easily."

"But you do have a spare bus cable?"

"Yes."

"Then let's get going."

"Spock," Kirk broke in, "in 12 minutes the tertiary system will default to the main computer and initiate the self-destruct."

"And we cannot bypass the main system to halt the self-destruct after that point, Captain. The Doctor will attempt to connect the cable from here to engineering. I will remain here to bring up the computer system if the connection is completed in time."

"Very well, Mr. Spock. Doctor, you realize the risk you are taking?"

"He has already left, Captian. I can assure you that he is well aware of the risk involved."

The minutes crawled by. Five minutes left. Kirk had a sudden vision of living out his life on one earth-type planet, with no way to return home, and the Enterprise destroyed. It would be as though all he had struggled for during the last five years had counted for nothing.

Four minutes.

"Captain, the Doctor's coming through now, I've got the cable."

Two minutes.

"Cable attached, Mr. Spock."

"Bringing up your computer control, Mr. Scott."

One minute.

"Secondary support system is activated, Captain. Tertiary is cut off."

Kirk looked at the chronometer. There had been thirty seconds left. He opened his communicator. "Sulu, as soon as all life support is back to normal, you will evacuate the TARDIS."

"Yes sir!"

In the background he could hear what seemed to be party noises - laughing, singing. Well, whatever the crew was doing at least they had not had to wait alone through the agony of the last hours. And one of Spock's and Scotty's first projects when they were out of this mess was going to be to find some way to bypass that tertiary system self-destruct. He'd be the one to decide what heroics were suitable to his ship.

As the Enterprise wandered among alien stars, most of the crew were involved in repairing the damage from the storm and the subsequent battle. But all their duties were routine compared to the assignment of the Science and Engineering officers - find the way for the Enterprise to return home.

Both Spock and the Doctor were on this team, and its first efforts were devoted to analyzing the physics of the Enterprise's entering the alternate universe. After this had been discovered, the team could decide what needed to be done to reverse the effect.

Neither Spock nor the Doctor needed as much sleep as the humans on the team. Spock, of course, spent his time in additional work and research, but the Doctor did not seem to be so inclined.

Kirk had offered the Doctor his choice of a room on the Enterprise or staying on his TARDIS. The Doctor had chosen the Enterprise. He had pointed out that he would be in closer touch with the happenings by being closer to the Enterprise communication system - and anyway - he'd never been on a ship like the Enterprise before.

Kirk was beginning to wonder if he was really taking the work he was supposed to be doing seriously - if he took anything seriously. He seemed to 'work' with the scientific team for only ten to fifteen minutes at a time. When Kirk sat in on the sessions he noticed that most of the Doctor's time was spent in looking at the results that the Enterprise team had generated, staring into space for a few minutes, and then making some minor change in one of the currently generated equations, and leaving the room. While the team did not seem to be upset with this 'working style', Kirk was beginning to seriously wonder just what the Doctor was contributing.

He would be walking down one of the Enterprise corridors and spot the Doctor doing tricks with a yo-yo in one of the branching halls - usually with a crew member watching. He had also managed to find out from someone how to program the food computers to produce what seemed to be his major source of sustenance - the ubiquitous jellybabies. Unfortunately, his programming had resulted in everyone else who ordered something getting at least one

jellybaby too. Kirk suspected that the programming was deliberate. He stared at the small red shape next to his fruit salad, looked at the other crew members who seemed to be happily eating theirs, and decided that he had better discuss the situation with McCoy.

"Jim, I've still got 23 seriously injured people to take care of - and I can't say that anything in the Doctor's behavior has bothered me in my job."

"I just have this feeling that he may be helping himself more than us."

"Have you talked to Spock about it?"

"Spock is busy."

"Look, if there was a problem with the Doctor and the help he's supposed to be giving the team, then Spock would have said something. You may think that he isn't doing anything, but Spock may find that what he is doing is exactly what the team needs. And I can tell you this, from the tests that we've been able to run on him and from Lt. Stephens' reports, his mind is at least the equal of Spock's, if not better. Have you read any of the Lieutenant's reports?"

"No. Not yet."

"Well, instead of worrying about what he is or isn't doing, why don't you read them? You're expecting him to act as though he was human, and believe me, he is not."

"Excuse me, Captain."

It was Uhura.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Sir, the crew was wondering if we could have a party for the Doctor?"

"A party?"

"Yes sir. We would like to thank him - all of us - for helping us with the life support problem - and letting us use his TARDIS and . . ."

"Lieutenant Uhura, the Doctor is supposed to be trying to find out how we can get this ship back to our own universe. I hardly think that a party would be in any way appropriate."

"Come on, Jim," McCoy said. "Considering what the crew has gone through, and the Lieutenant's expressions of their feelings, why don't you let her check with Spock and the Doctor. If they have time, it might be a good idea."

Uhura was looking at Kirk expectantly. He shot an annoyed glance at McCoy. "Very well, Lieutenant. If Mr. Spock says that he can spare the Doctor and if the Doctor accepts, you may have your party."

"Thank you, sir."

The party started off in an orderly fashion. The Doctor turned up for the occasion in a black velvet coat, solid white scarf, and top hat. Kirk assumed that this was his concession to formality.

While appropriate beverages and food were in ample supply, everyone, including the Doctor, seemed to be on their best behavior. Kirk was somewhat surprised to see Spock join the party, but was also relieved. The presence of his first officer usually kept an Enterprise party from turning into a raucous affair.

Spock had brought his Vulcan lyre with him, and Kirk was not surprised to see that he and Uhura were going to perform. What surprised him was the performance. Uhura had found an old Earth song - never popular - called "My Friend the Doctor". With somewhat revised wording, it had the Doctor laughing in one minute and the rest of the crew with him in two. From that point on, the beverage consumption increased considerably.

Kirk left half-way through the evening. The Doctor had borrowed Spock's lyre, with Spock's approval, Kirk noticed. Urged on by Lt. Kyle, he proceeded to teach the crew some early English drinking songs. Kirk heard that the evening wound up with a spontaneous limerick contest.

Kirk made a point of turning up in the briefing room that the Scientific team was using early the next morning. To his surprise, the whole team was there, and working, and, a few moments later, the Doctor walked in. He seemed to be unusually somber.

"I am afraid that you people are going to have to get out of this universe."

Spock turned and looked at the Doctor with raised eyebrows. "Indeed?"

"Look here, Doctor, this team has been working on that problem for nearly a week now," Kirk said angrily. "What makes you say that . . ."

"I believe that the operative words in the Doctor's statement are 'have to'," Spock interrupted. Kirk looked at him and then at the Doctor in surprise. "What have you discovered?" Spock continued.

"I ran some studies last night, in the TARDIS, and unless you're out of here in three weeks, there are going to be serious disturbances on the Space-Time continuum which will have the gravest consequences for several of the races native to this universe and which will result in your ultimate destruction."

Kirk looked at Spock. His Science Officer accepted the Doctor's statement. Well, at least it might get the Doctor working on the problem with more dedication than he had previously exhibited.

Spock turned to the computer and displayed an equation. "I believe that this is the effect that has brought us here."

The Doctor studied it. "Yes, that would do it."

"So the question is, then, to reverse it," said Scotty.

The team studied the figures. Kirk noticed that the Doctor seemed to be falling asleep. Then he suddenly sat up. "Of course!" He changed some of the figures in the equation.

"That would seem to be the desired effect," Spock said.

"And we've got just enough dilithium to do it," said Scotty.

Kirk breathed a sigh of relief. At last there seemed to be a way out of the trap. And if he had to thank the Doctor for it, he would.

"Wait a minute," the Doctor said, staring intently at the display. "There's something wrong."

"I can see no error," said Spock.

"You're not a Time Lord," said the Doctor, still frowning at the display. "No, you can't use that, but I can't . . ." He got up abruptly and paced around the table. "The Matrix!"

"The Matrix?" Spock asked.

"Yes, the Time Lord Matrix - the summary of all Time Lord experiences - the answer's there."

"Can you obtain it?" Spock inquired.

The Doctor stood still for a moment, his head flung back. Then sweat broke out on his face and he stumbled back into a chair.

"Doctor," Spock said, "are you all right?"

"Yes - and no." The Doctor looked around the table and managed a faint smile. "I have been exposed to the Matrix, but it was contaminated, and I - I do not have full access to all the knowledge that is there."

Spock raised one eyebrow.

"Can you explain that more completely, Doctor?" Kirk asked.

The Doctor hesitated, then, shrugging his shoulders and exchanging a brief glance with Spock began speaking. "When I became a - renegade - that portion of my mind was made inaccessible to me. By the Time Lord Council. Since then . . . there are times when I seem to be able to access part of it, but not consistently - and not now."

"Spock?" Kirk knew that mind blocks of this kind were more likely to be familiar to the Vulcan than to anyone else on the ship. Spock's eyes met Kirk's and then he turned to the Doctor, who was now staring at the computer display in obvious frustration.

"Doctor," The Doctor turned to look at Spock. "You state that there is a block on certain portions of your memory."

The Doctor nodded. "It was their right to place it on me - their means of punishment."

"Does the need for the block still remain?"

The Doctor looked surprised and suddenly thoughtful. "No - no, there is no more reason for it. No one thought about it, until now."

"Can the block be removed, then?"

"Are you a Time Lord, Spock? Is there another Time Lord on this vessel?" The Doctor got up and paced to the other side of the room. He turned back and stared at Spock. "Can you reach into my mind and remove it? Oh, I know that you are a touch-telepath, but can you destroy what Time Lords of the First Rank - with infinitely more experience - made?" He sat down again and this time his smile carried no humor.

"Doctor," said Spock, templing his hands. "you are a Time Lord. Do you believe that the block should be removed?"

There was a pause. The Doctor looked at Spock, obviously puzzled.

"Or do you still accept it as part of your punishment? Would your fellow Time Lords - now - consider it necessary?"

"Necessary? No, I don't think they even remember it. And until now, I really haven't needed it." He looked at the computer display again with annoyance.

"As you have observed, Doctor, I am only a touch-telepath. However, Vulcans have some ability in these matters - if you can cooperate fully with me."

"You think you can remove it?"

"Not by myself, but with your support. Without your full cooperation, your own psychic abilities could interfere and - negate - our purpose."

"Then it also carries some danger for you." The Doctor looked directly at Spock.

"There is that possibility. The melding of one mind to another - especially between different species of varying psychic abilities - to remove or change something in one of the minds - can be hazardous. Either, or both of our minds could be lost. There is therefore a risk for you too."

"Not a causal encounter, then." The Doctor said, and Kirk thought that he almost seemed to be laughing.

"No." said Spock, maintaining the tension. "Is it your wish to make the attempt?"

The Doctor thought for a moment, then turned to Kirk. "Captain, is what Spock is proposing as dangerous to him as I think?"

"It could well be. Spock has never used the mind-meld casually." Kirk felt frustrated. The Doctor was acting as though he could understand everything about his first officer, and in this area Kirk knew that his knowledge was incomplete.

"If it were possible for you to remain in this universe without harm - or if the time we had to work in were longer, I might suggest a delay. As it is . . . what must be done?"

"I would suggest that we go to Dr. McCoy and utilize the isolation area of Sickbay."

McCoy was not pleased at the idea of the attempt, but set up the isolation area as Spock requested, a single bed and a chair alongside it and full medical monitoring. He looked at the room grimly.

"Jim, you realize that we could lose both of them."

"They've already discussed that possibility. Our major concern at the moment has to be to find a way to return the Enterprise to our own universe. Even the Doctor admits that."

"Even the Doctor? Jim, I think that . . ."

Lieutenant Stephens walked into the room and McCoy did not finish his statement. Kirk decided not to ask him to - if it was important, McCoy would find some time to talk to him about it. The Lieutenant eyed the isolation area with as much distaste as McCoy. Kirk studied her for a moment. Of all the crew members, she had spent the most time with the Doctor since he had arrived. He was curious about her reaction.

"Lieutenant, you seem to share Dr. McCoy's misgivings about this experiment."

She looked up at him in amazement. "Captain, you do realize that of the two we are much more likely to lose Mr. Spock if the experiment fails?"

Kirk studied her. While all her records indicated a level-headed practical approach on her field missions, her reports on the Doctor had a slight tinge of gullibility. Obviously the alien Doctor had had as much effect on her as on the other crew members. "What makes you say that?"

"Because of the Vulcan regard for the mind-meld, Mr. Spock has had the least experience in effecting a strong mind probe. That is an ability that develops with practice. The Doctor, on the other hand, has not only exercised his ability to create and maintain a strong probe, he has also experienced and resisted mind probes from other alien species."

"And how do you know that?"

"Because I have been studying, talking to, and observing him ever since you made that my assignment. Oh, he doesn't brag about it, Captain, but obtaining such information is my field. Believe me, his experiences are not conducive to permitting an alien probe into the depths of his mind. I doubt that he would even easily tolerate such a probe from his own species."

"With Spock then, what could happen?"

"It all depends on the Doctor. If he truly trusts Spock - not just consciously, but unconsciously, enough to allow the probe to reach its intended goals, then they will succeed. If he does not - or cannot - the defense mechanism of his mind could snap shut and destroy Spock's mind."

Spock entered the room as the Lieutenant had. "Is the Doctor here?"

"Not yet," McCoy answered. "The room is ready. Spock, are you certain that this is necessary? Lieutenant Stephens believes that it is quite dangerous."

Spock hesitated for a moment. "Doctor McCoy, it is quite necessary." He had withdrawn into his most Vulcan image. Kirk looked at him. Could it be that the danger the Lieutenant had suggested was indeed real? He started to say something to Spock, when the Vulcan turned and went into the room. He sat down in the chair, hands templed, withdrawn.

"You can't stop it now, Jim." McCoy said. "It's between them."

The Doctor came in. He had disgarded his coat, scarf, and hat and was once again wearing a cossack-like white shirt, tweed trousers, and boots.

"Is everything ready?" he said cheerfully.

McCoy nodded grimly toward the room and the silent Spock within. "If you two are determined to proceed."

The Doctor smiled at McCoy and started to enter the room when Lt. Stephens stopped him. "Doctor." He looked down at her in surprise. "Remember you **must** give up the control to Spock." Their eyes met briefly and he nodded and went into the room.

Kirk felt a sudden chill of fear, realizing that more than the life of his first officer, of his friend, lay in the hands of this alien whom he did not trust.

McCoy closed the door and turned on the intercom system. The medical monitors were on. He looked at Kirk again, shaking his head this time - "You can't stop it now, Jim."

The Doctor stopped just inside the door and looked at Spock. Without disturbing him, he lay down on the bed, closed his eyes for a moment and then said "Mr. Spock, if you're ready?"

Spock's eyes opened slowly and he looked at the Doctor. The Doctor smiled and closed his eyes. Spock untempled his hands and then spread them on the Doctor's face.

"My mind to your mind . . ." came the familiar words.

The Doctor's body stiffened momentarily. Spock's grip tightened.

"The Doctor has to drop his own telepathic blocks," Lt. Stephans whispered.

Sweat broke out on the Doctor's face and Spock's eyes closed tightly. The Doctor's body relaxed.

"My mind to your mind . . ." Spock's body seemed to encircle the Doctor's although he did not move. There was silence from the room. Kirk was waiting for the outpouring of words he was used to hearing during one of Spock's mind melds. But nothing seemed to happen. He looked down at Lt. Stephans.

"What's going on?"

"They are both natural telepaths, Captain. This is quite unlike what you have seen before."

Perspiration gleamed on Spock's brow. The Doctor's body alternately tensed and relaxed.

Suddenly the eyes of the two opened and met. Kirk could almost see some kind of exchange take place.

"They are in close contact now," said Lt. Stephans. "There is only the barrier to be broken."

The eyes of the two closed again. From his own experience Kirk remembered the feeling of another mind in his, and he was not telepathic. What would it be like if that mind was attacking yours? And if you had a real ability to defend yourself - for the first time he realized that the danger Spock was willingly encountering was formidable. Everything dependent on the ability of another to relinquish control, the whole dependent on the tightest of disciplines of the minds involved.

Discipline - and the Doctor?

"Heart rates increasing, Jim," said McCoy.

The Doctor's head began to move restlessly in Spock's grip. A scream emerged from the Doctor's mouth but it was Spock's voice that sounded.

"No, it must remain, it is the penalty. / The penalty no longer exists: the penalty has been paid." Spock's voice now in the familiar mono-duologue. "The punishment must be complete. / The punishment is no longer required. You have earned the right to be free. / I am the President. The Matrix is mine. The Matrix is invaded. The Master. Death to all Time Lords. My people. There is danger. I cannot release the Matrix. I must drive out the enemy!"

"Heart rates still increasing. I don't know how much longer they can take it."

The Doctor's eyes opened and stared blindly at the ceiling. Spock's voice continued, a monologue this time. "Layer by layer, opening . . ."

Another 'voice' - this time exploding in Kirk's mind.

"Broadcast telepathy," said Lt. Stephans, wincing. "Spock has opened some new abilities that the Doctor has."

"The enemy has gone, the way is open."

Spock's hands broke contact. Grabbing the Doctor's shoulders, he caught the Doctor's eyes with his own. "You must proceed. I will not probe your knowledge."

"I must have your support, or the barrier will not be fully broken."

Spock paused and then resumed contact. The Doctor's eyes closed again.

"So. . .in this way, slowly. . ." The Doctor's head jerked fitfully in Spock's grasp. "Yes, you are there, the path is open. I enter."

A stillness descended on the room.

"Heart rates going down."

The Doctor was sweating again; Spock seemed to be in a passive trance and Kirk was reminded of the first, involuntary contact Spock had made with the Doctor.

"Readings back to normal, Jim."

"If they can break the bond now . . ." said Lt. Stephans.

Both sets of alien eyes opened and met again. Spock's head jerked back. The texture of the mental voice changed. *"Yes, so you have joined with us."*

"No." Spock's hands moved to break the meld but the Doctor's hands quickly held them in place. "I am my own. I am Vulcan."

"You are still that. But you are more. It has been earned."

Spock's eyes closed. The Doctor's hands reached up to Spock's face assuming the Vulcan contact points. *"Accept."*

Spock seemed to nod in the Doctor's grasp. Spock's hands fell away from the Doctor, then the Doctor's from him. The Doctor came to a half sitting position. Spock's head was still bent, his eyes closed.

"Spock!" cried Kirk, heading for the door. McCoy and Stephans stopped him.

"Jim," McCoy said. "You've got to let the Doctor finish now."

The Doctor took hold of Spock's hands which were lying limply on the bed. "Spock," the Doctor called, then louder, and Kirk could almost feel a mental calling with the verbal, "Spock." Spock's eyes opened. There was a depth to them that Kirk had rarely seen before.

"What have you given me?"

"Something more than you had before, but nothing you had not earned, were not entitled to, or more than you can handle. Why not ask what you have given me?"

Spock's eyes met the Doctor's. The Doctor smiled. "Spock, I am whole again. I think that you can realize what that means. I know you - now - and I know what you risked. I risked no more than I have risked before, and for no more reason. Accept my gift, my friend, and look on it as repayment for what my people failed to do in this world for your people." Spock looked intently at the Doctor and nodded.

The Doctor turned to the window. "Captain, I believe that I have the solution to the problem."

McCoy opened the door.

Spock got up slowly. Kirk went to him. "Spock, are you all right?"

"I believe so, Captain. It was a most unusual experience."

"Spock," called the Doctor, "come on, we've got to get this thing solved."

"Coming."

The two left the room. Kirk and Stephans followed. McCoy decided that he was going to review the medical records of the happening again.

"Lieutenant," said Kirk, walking behind Spock and the Doctor as they headed toward the briefing room, "What has Spock got now that he didn't have before?"

"It's difficult to say, Captain. Certainly some expanded knowledge or awareness that is normally unique to Time Lords. Perhaps an increase in his own telepathic abilities, perhaps some of the Doctor's sense of humor."

"Lieutenant, I do not find that particularly amusing."

"No sir, but don't you think it would be interesting?"

"No."

"Well, sir, you should be aware that it is not uncommon after such a melding as we have seen for the participants to take on each other's characteristics - for a time."

The Lieutenant nodded her head at the two ahead of them. Kirk saw that Spock was accepting one of the Doctor's jellybabies.

"Well, Lieutenant, if it gets us out of this universe and back into our own, I can tolerate anything."

"I do hope that your tolerance is up to what might happen, Captain."

Back in the briefing room, both the Doctor and Spock resurveyed the computer display. After a few minutes, the Doctor started smiling. Leaning on the table, he turned and looked at Spock.

"Do you see it?"

Still looking puzzled, Spock indicated an area of the equation. "There?"

"Exactly."

It seemed to Kirk that Spock was smiling back at the Doctor, but no change was visible except the disappearance of puzzlement. He glanced at Lt. Stephens and she nodded. So he was not the only one to have noticed something!

The Doctor started entering some new figures into the computer and the display changed. "You could probably work it out, but you can see where using that formula would have been disastrous to you."

"Indeed." Spock nodded.

"What was the matter?" Kirk asked.

The Doctor looked at Spock and gestured as if giving him the center stage.

"The Time Factor, Captain."

"Time Factor?"

"Yes, in transferring between universes there is always an inherent Time Factor. Had we tried to return to our universe using the original formula, we would have arrived in the correct universe, but 300 years before the time we disappeared." Spock turned to the Doctor, one eyebrow cocked.

"A somewhat simplified explanation, but correct. With this change, you should return within five minutes of the time you left and you will not need to return to the Sontaran area."

Scotty had been eyeing the changed equation and suddenly spoke. "Captain, I canna say that this willna do the trick, but we dinna hae the power for it."

Spock and the Doctor surveyed the equation. Spock nodded. "Mr. Scott is correct, Captain. The new formula calls for at least one third again as much power as our present dilithium will give us."

"Could we reverse the polarity?" the Doctor asked.

"Doctor, ye canna be serious," exclaimed Scotty.

"I do not think that will work - this time." Kirk could have sworn that Spock was trying to keep from laughing.

"Well, well, never a solution but another problem," said the Doctor. "What will you need to solve this one?"

Scott had apparently been doing some calculating too and he answered immediately. "At least six more dilithium crystals. I can juryrig a system so that they could give us the power when we need it, but we've got to have the dilithium."

Kirk noticed, without a great deal of surprise, that everyone in the room turned to the Doctor. Well, after all, this was his universe, and he seemed to like playing the deus ex machina and pulling the Enterprise out of difficulty.

"Well, Doctor, where can we get the dilithium?"

"There is a planet in this area which has a supply of dilithium crystals."

"Can we buy - or trade - with them to get the crystals?"

"I don't know." the Doctor sat forward pensively, templeing his hands in front of his face. Kirk felt a slight shock at this Spock-like gesture. He glanced over at Spock and felt his shock compound as he saw that Spock was leaning back in his chair looking ready to put his feet up on the table. He felt Lt. Stephens touch him gently on the arm and heard her whisper "Tolerance, Captain."

The Doctor untempled his hands and stood up.

"This planet is highly unusual, even for this universe. Apparently a humanoid race started to settle it about a thousand years ago. It should have been a normal settlement - everyone working together in the early years, wars and other problems coming along later - you know the patterns."

Kirk saw Lt. Stephens nodding - apparently what the Doctor was saying was something familiar to CS&C.

"Instead a split occurred very early. Some of the colonists were determined to maintain a high level of technology in spite of almost impossible difficulties, and others wanted to live the basic 'back to nature' life that seemed to fit the planet."

"So we have to deal with one group or the other?" Kirk asked.

"More than that. There were certain aspects about the planet which caused an abnormal development of what you call PSI powers in some of the people - on both sides. The 'back to nature' group accepted these and encouraged them. The technologists ignored and repressed them. The two groups have now developed two totally opposite ways of dealing with any type of problem."

"I don't see that that makes a difference." Kirk felt that the Doctor was seeing problems where there weren't any.

"It wouldn't - if it hadn't been for the invasion."

"Invasion?"

"Yes - an utterly ruthless race recently tried to conquer the planet and both sides ultimately joined together to defeat the invaders."

"Then we only have one side to deal with."

"Well, when the would-be conquerers left, they wanted to take revenge on the planet and the people that had withstood them - to prove that ultimately they could win. You know the type."

Kirk saw Spock nod out of the corner of his eye and glancing over at him saw that his feet were up on the table now. He was about to say something when a kick on the shins diverted him. He glared at Lt. Stephens who was staring innocently at the Doctor.

"At any rate, Captain," the Doctor went on. Kirk was certain that he had missed none of the byplay. "The invaders placed several fission type bombs around the planet in such a fashion that at irregular periods for the next five years the orbits will decay and a bomb will come down."

"And if they simply explode the bomb, they'll create a ring of radiation around the planet that will eventually destroy them." Scotty said.

"Exactly."

"Sounds like we might be able to help." Kirk said.

"We can certainly remove the bombs from their orbits and dispose of them somewhere else safely." said Scotty.

"Would that be sufficient for a trade for dilithium?" Kirk asked.

"Possible." The Doctor seemed to be studying his hands again. "Does your Prime Directive prevent you from helping other people?"

"No. Just from interfering with the natural development of an indigenous culture." responded Lt. Stephens.

"Well, on this planet, the dilithium crystals are mined and controlled by the back to nature group - the Norms, as they call themselves. They can use the dilithium to expand and amplify their psychic abilities. And it was one of their cities that was hit by the first bomb that fell." The Doctor looked at Kirk expectantly.

"Are you suggesting that we supply medical aid?"

"Yes, can you agree to that?"

Kirk responded without hesitation, "Yes."

"Very well, then, let's get to the planet and do some horse trading. The coordinates. . ." The Doctor punched up some figures on the computer display.

"What," said Spock sitting upright again, "is the name of this planet?"

"Lightunder," said the Doctor. He started out the door and stopped. "One more thing, you know I told you that some of the people had psychic abilities?"

"Yes." Kirk failed to see why the Doctor was reemphasizing a point.

"Well, apparently the ability is tied to a recessive gene, because you can usually recognize a psychic by their physical appearance too."

"How?" Lt. Stephens asked. Kirk supposed that such an item might be of interest to a xenobiologist.

"By the color of their hair." The Doctor started out the door.

The Lieutenant looked puzzled for a minute and then shouted "What color is it?"

The Doctor's head reappeared around the corner. His grin reminded Kirk of the Cheshire cat in the old story.

"Green." He said and disappeared.

The estimated time of arrival to the planet the Doctor had specified was two days.

On the first day, Kirk ordered a Class One check of the ship. While that kept the crew busy for a while, and everything checked out in excellent condition, by evening things were back in their normal 'hurry up and wait' mode. Kirk was concerned about his crew's morale. They had, after all, been overdue for R&R before starting the return trip to Earth, and had had a succession of emergencies in a rather short time.

He spent the evening walking around the ship, visiting areas where the crew was stationed and gathered.

In the gym Sulu was practicing what appeared to be a new and difficult series of fencing moves. "Improving your technique, Mr. Sulu?"

"Yes sir. The Doctor showed me some offensive moves that I'd never heard of before. The problem is to try to master them."

"The Doctor?"

"Yes sir, he said he learned them from a Captain in Cleopatra's army."

Kirk watched as Sulu went back to his practicing. He knew his history well enough to know that at the time of Cleopatra the swords used were not the epee Sulu used. But Sulu seemed to find the whole thing credible, so Kirk decided not to try to argue about it.

Passing through the Engineering section, Kirk saw that Scotty seemed to be involved in analyzing a silver object about 13 centimeters long and 3 centimeters in diameter. He knew that Scotty had been working on the designs which would implement the extra dilithium crystals and he walked over to see what was going on. The silver object was something he had never seen before.

"Something new, Scotty?"

"Aye, Captain. It's a Sonic Screwdriver, and it's a beautiful wee bairn."

"A Sonic Screwdriver?" The term sounded more like an exotic bar concoction than something that would fascinate his Chief Engineer.

"Aye, it's the Doctor's."

"The Doctor's?"

"I've been trying to persuade him to let me look at that TARDIS of his, but he doesn't seem to want to let me do that."

"So how did you get this - Sonic Screwdriver?"

"Well, he says that if I can duplicate it, then I can look at the TARDIS."

"Can you?" Kirk was confident that nothing mechanical was beyond Scotty's skills.

"Not yet. Oh, it's a bonnie wee bairn. So far I've found thirty uses for it, but I canna yet make another one."

"Did the Doctor make it?"

"Well, he designed it."

"Well, Scotty, if you keep at it, you'll find the secret."

"Secret! Nae, Captain, this is pure engineering genius. And an honor it is to be working on it."

Kirk walked out shaking his head. The Doctor certainly seemed to have found the way to keep Scotty away from the TARDIS.

One of the Rec rooms had been turned into what Lt. Kyle explained to Kirk as the site of the Starfleet Yo-Yo Championships.

"Where did all the yo-yos come from, Lieutenant?"

"Oh, the Doctor gave them to us."

"Did he set up the rules for this - competition?"

"Set them up? No sir. He told us what the rules were - back on Earth."

"Will he be participating?"

"No sir. He said he'd already won his championship in 1923."

Kirk watched an Andorian ensign attempt a 'walk the doggie.'

"All the Andorians are very good at this, sir. They seem to have a knack for it."

"That would certainly be helpful."

"If you'll excuse me, sir, my turn is coming up."

"Of course."

On his way to Rec room 4 Kirk mulled over what he had seen. His crew was alert, happy, and there certainly seemed to be no cause for alarm. He decided he would see if Spock would join him for a game of chess. Certainly they could both use the break.

In Rec room 4 Spock was already playing chess - with the Doctor.

Kirk walked over and looked at the board. It was obviously near the end of the game and as Kirk neared them the Doctor made a move.

"Check and mate, I believe."

Spock studied the board. "You have learned the game well."

"It's much more challenging than the one dimensional version I'm used to. I'll have to teach it to K-9 when I get him fixed."

"K-9?" Kirk asked.

"My dog."

"Your dog? - plays chess?" Kirk looked at Spock in hopes of some amplification of the strange statement.

"Actually, K-9 is a highly sophisticated robot." Spock said, resetting the pieces on the boards. Kirk relaxed, at least his first officer was back to normal.

"However," Spock went on, "he is really a very good dog."



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The Doctor had looked slightly disappointed at Spock's mundane explanation and now smiled across the board at him. Kirk was shocked to see his first officer smile back.

"Spock" - Spock turned to look at him, his face expressionless again. "Um - would you say that the Doctor plays as illogically as humans?"

"Captain," one Vulcan eyebrow raised, "the Doctor's mind works in a unique fashion. I would not compare the processes."

"Would you care to play the next game, Captain?" asked the Doctor, starting to get up from his chair.

"No, no." Kirk motioned him back down. "Mr. Spock and I play quite often." Of course, as their mission was ending, he and Spock . . . Well, he thought, at least the Doctor was out of mischief. He went back to his cabin determined to have a talk with McCoy the next day.

"Bones, are you sure that Spock is all right?"

"Jim, he's fine. He just had me give him a complete physical."

"He asked for one?"

"Jim, it was the - logical - thing to do. He wanted to be sure that there were no after effects from that mind-meld experiment. Made me give the Doctor one too. Not that I needed to add any more of those strange readings to my records."

"Don't you find that - strange?"

"Before this whole thing happened - yes. Now - well, I don't know what you're worried about, but Spock is healthier - in body and mind than I've ever seen him. What are you so worried about?"

"Bones, I don't know. I just have this strange feeling that something is wrong - with the Enterprise - and that the Doctor is somehow related to it."

"Well he certainly has done nothing but help us since we got in this mess. The crew likes him, I like him and Spock likes him. You're the only one having problems dealing with him. Jim . . ."

"Dr. McCoy, Lieutenant Caffrey is fibrillating again." Chapel called from inside on of the sickbay areas.

"Damn - Jim, I want to talk to you about this after I take care of my patient."

Kirk started glumly at the door as McCoy left. He could not believe that he was the one out of step. Every feeling that he'd learned to rely on told him that something was wrong.

"Captain Kirk." It was Sulu on the intercom from the Bridge.

"Kirk here."

"Coming into the Lightunder system."

"I'm on my way up."

Orbiting the planet the next day, the selected landing party met in one of the briefing rooms.

Lt. Stephens had been working with the Doctor gathering information about the planet through a linkup of the TARDIS and the Enterprise sensors. "Luckily the Techies - the technologists - and the Norms are still speaking to one another," she said. "We don't want to get involved in a civil war. Only one bomb has fallen on a populated area - the first one. It destroyed the Norm city of Metebe and left strong radioactive aftereffects. The population in the area is suffering from radiation exposure. The Norms were able to deflect the second bomb as it was falling, but burnt out - lost - five of their best telekenetics to do it. The area it landed in was unpopulated, but we will need to do a clean up of the radiation. The bombs are too distant for the Norms to move them further out, or keep them up, and the Techies

don't have a clear enough understanding of how the internal mechanism works to enable the Norms to defuse one as it comes down. They are in a desperate situation and they know it. However, they are very proud and will resent any intrusion even though it is intended to be helpful."

"Full diplomacy, then, Lieutenant," said Kirk. He noticed that McCoy was staring at him but he had been too caught up in the plans for the planetary contact - including a possible use of the Doctor's TARDIS as the 'hospital base' to get back to talk to him. It would have to wait.

"Diplomacy in spades, Captain, if we hope to accomplish anything."

"Doctor, if you're ready?"

The Doctor had his feet up on the table and his hat over his head. Kirk was convinced that he had been sleeping.

"What - oh yes - are we ready?"

"We will be beaming down into the meeting room of the capital city of the Techies. The leaders of both sides should be there." Spock said.

As the group materialized, Kirk could see the surprise of the men and women in the room. He hoped that this display of superior technology would give them a bargaining advantage. He looked around at the people. Even from their clothing he could distinguish between the two groups. The Techies were wearing military type one piece suits, and the Norms were wearing leather and fur garments and all carried swords.

"We have come in peace." Kirk said, spreading his hands to show the absence of weapons. "We would offer our assistance. . ."

"We do not wish the assistance of aliens!" shouted one of the Norms, a short but powerfully built man. Murmurs from the others in the room indicated that they agreed. Kirk was starting to frame another sentence when the Doctor abruptly stepped forward. He calmly surveyed the group and said "I am the Doctor, a Time Lord of Gallifrey. We have determined that without our intervention your planet will be destroyed in 16 months. We have decided that we will intervene to save you - for a price."

Kirk thought that the arrogance in his tone was unmistakable.

The man who had refused Kirk stared at the Doctor. His green hair seemed to bristle. "A Time Lord. We have heard of you." A small polished dilithium crystal that he wore on the inside of his left wrist began to glow as he lifted his hand. When his hand was level with his eyes the crystal suddenly flashed. Kirk felt what seemed to be a momentary pressure on his mind and heard Spock take a sudden deep breath. The Doctor seemed amused.

"So. It is true. What is your price and who are these people with you who are not Time Lords?"

"Our price is six large energy crystals - the size you do not use because you cannot control them." The scorn in the Doctor's voice hung in the air. "These people have been chosen to assist me."

"What do you offer us?"

"Medical help for those of your people suffering from the effects of the first explosion. And we will remove the remaining devices from your skies."

"Will you treat our people in our own land - without bringing in large machines?"

"We will land our own dwelling place where you specify. The machines we use will be no more to you than a black box that makes noises. What machines we have in our dwelling place will be of no concern to you."

"Will you teach us so that we may avoid something like this happening again?" one of the Techies asked.

The Doctor looked at him as if he was some kind of lower species of insect. "We will teach you enough to better defend yourselves." The Doctor looked at the group. "Do you accept our offer?"

"We must discuss. . ." murmured the Techie.

"What is there to discuss!" said the Norm. "This is a Time Lord and he speaks the truth. Must we discuss if we wish to live or die?"

There was no dissenting voice from the group as they looked ruefully at each other. The Norm turned back to the Doctor.

"Very well, Time Lord. We will agree to your bargain. But those of you who come on our land must agree to abide by our customs."

"Agreed." said the Doctor. "Where do you wish us to place the medical treatment center?"

"We have established a place of healing in Besteco."

"Then we will land there. After we remove the devices orbiting your planet, we will send people to meet with you." The Doctor nodded at the Techies.

One of the Techies stepped forward. He was tall, with blond hair and a beard. "I am Lif d'Lewis, head of my people. We will be glad to learn all that you are willing to teach us."

The Doctor nodded an acknowledgement of the Techie's statement. Kirk could not help thinking that if they had to deal only with this man and his people instead of the feisty Norm who had taken over, the whole thing could have been handled better.

"Captain, if you will call for the beam-up." The Doctor turned back to the Norm. "Alert your people at Besteco. We will be there in one hour." He turned and nodded at Kirk, obviously concluding the conversation. Kirk opened his communicator. He felt as though he was an Ensign again.

"Kirk to Enterprise, beam up landing party."

As the transporter beam picked up the landing party, Kirk felt a sudden surge of anger. What right did the Doctor have to step in like that! He could feel the emotion pulsing through him as the group materialized on the Enterprise. As he turned to the Doctor, prepared to express his anger, Spock stepped forward and said "An excellent job, Doctor. I believe you accomplished everything we desired."

"Even what you offered the Techies is well within the limits of the Prime Directive. How did you know that that was the way to approach them?" Lt. Stephans asked. The Doctor looked slightly surprised.

"It was the - logical - thing to do." He smiled at Spock, shaking his head slightly.

Kirk felt as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped on him. Spock and the Lieutenant were right. What they had wanted done was done - so why did it matter WHO had done it? Suppressing an uneasy feeling of having been in the wrong, he turned to McCoy. "Bones, are you and your medical team ready?"

"As ready as we can be, Jim. It's a good thing that we'd already expected that we'd have to use the Doctor's TARDIS as our base. We've installed some of our medical computers and laboratory equipment. The Doctor and Mr. Spock have also arranged to implement a direct link between the TARDIS' computer system and our science computer."

"You're satisfied with the arrangements, then?"

"They're better than most I've had to work with under the Prime Directive on a primitive planet."

"Bones," said the Doctor. "If you will have your medical team at the TARDIS in - say - fifteen minutes? Lt. Stephans and I want to review some of the customs of the local people. Dorcy has a feeling that certain aspects of the local culture were not emphasized strongly enough in the standard briefing tape she made earlier. The Norms are very set in certain ways, and we cannot afford to offend them."

"We'll be there."

"Captain, if you are planning on coming down to the planet, you should hear this." The Doctor said.

"I'll have to get it later, Doctor. At the moment we need to get this ship ready to dispose of these orbital bombs."

The Doctor looked at Kirk and, with a slight smile, nodded. "Of course, Captain."

Beaming down the TARDIS was a learning experience for Lt. Kyle under Spock's tuition. Apparently something of the unique nature of the TARDIS had to be calculated for during transportation and Kirk was thankful that the beam-down with his crew aboard was successful.

He looked at the now empty transporter pads and turned to Spock.

"Why didn't the Doctor take the TARDIS down on its own, Spock? Wouldn't it have been simpler?"

"With the TARDIS in its present condition, there is always the chance that it might not land where it was directed."

"You mean that the Doctor can't control it."

"His level of control of the TARDIS suits him, Captain. In this situation, I preferred that we handle the transportation."

"Spock, there are some things that I simply do not understand."

"Indeed, Captain?" Kirk looked over that saw that his first officer was looking at him expectantly.

"Not now, Spock, we've got some bombs to get rid of."

"But of course, Captain."

The removal and defusing of the orbiting bombs was time consuming but relatively simple for the Enterprise crew. The defused bombs were dumped into a sun of a nearby uninhabited planetary system. Kirk was pleased to see that his crew was handling the situation in their usual efficient fashion. Apparently with the disruptive influence of the Doctor removed, things were going to return to normal. Within a week the Enterprise had returned and was orbiting Lightunder again.

Scotty, a team of Enterprise engineers, and selected members of the CS&C group beamed down to meet with Lyr d'Lewis. Another group was assigned to 'clean up' the unpopulated area of the second explosion. Kirk decided to go down with Spock to see how the medical group was getting along.

In the transporter room, Spock placed a small black box on the transporter console.

"Lieutenant Kyle, initiate signaling sequence 21CQ305260." Spock said.

"Yes sir."

"What's that all about, Spock?" Kirk asked as they walked toward the transporter pads.

"Without the adjustment and amplification that box provides for our signals, we would not be able to beam down inside the TARDIS. The Doctor has specifically requested that any landing party at Besteco beam down directly into the TARDIS and await further contact."

"Are you saying that without that device, we wouldn't be able to transport into the TARDIS?"

"The TARDIS has unique defensive capabilities."

Kirk sighed. He was back in the strange world of the Doctor's again. They materialized inside the TARDIS control room just as the Doctor was coming in through the outside door.

"Oh, Spock," he said, "I'm glad you're here. Come on down to the workshop. I want you to look at something."

Spock and the Doctor started through one of the other doors when the Doctor stuck his head back through the door.

"Captain - don't leave the TARDIS until you check with Lt. Stephens." Then he disappeared again.

Kirk waited for some time, his impatience growing. Other members of the medical team came hurriedly through the TARDIS control room, apparently to and from the area where the Doctor and Spock were. They barely acknowledged his presence. Lt. Stephans did not appear.

His patience finally exhausted, he decided that it would not hurt to go and look for the Lieutenant or, preferably, McCoy. They probably just wanted to reemphasize some of the local customs. He had already seen the briefing tape twice, and had been taking care of himself on alien planets several years longer than the Lieutenant, but if they wanted to make some special point, he'd find them and let them make it.

As he stepped out of the TARDIS, he noticed that the 'hospital' seemed to be a converted large stone building. The TARDIS had actually been located in a room in the building.

The other rooms he saw as he walked down the hall were filled with patients. The medical personnel, both his own people and some from the native population seemed to be constantly busy. He could not see McCoy or Stephans anywhere.

At length his wanderings took him to the front door of the building. The sunlight and open air outside looked inviting after the closed-in aura of the hospital. He even seemed to be experiencing a slightly nauseous feeling from the strange pungency. All hospitals smell, he thought, and decided to step outside and look around.

Leaning on the beast-shaped stone structure at the foot of the hospital steps, he looked out at what seemed to be a town square. There were shops on three sides and the normal activity of people going in and out with and without parcels. Horses - or a very close facsimile of the earth animal, except for the cloven hooves and horn - and carriages were tied up by the stores.

He took a deep breath of the planet's air. It tasted good.

He noticed a girl - a young woman - standing by one of the shops, apparently waiting for someone. He looked at her intensely.

Her hair was a dark green, so dark as to be almost black. The slight breeze blowing against the lightweight rose fabric of her ankle length gown outlined a figure of delightful proportions.

She suddenly looked up at him, revealing dark black eyes formerly masked by thick and curly downcast eyelashes. Her skin was fair, highlighted by a natural rose shading on her cheeks and lips which Kirk could tell owed nothing to artifice. She met his gaze for an instant and then cast her eyes down again momentarily. He was not surprised when, after a brief moment, the open and provocative gaze met his again.

How lovely she was - and would be on any planet he had ever visited. The rose of her cheeks seemed to deepen and a faint smile appeared on her lips and the black eyes seemed to sparkle. He could not speak to her, he remembered that from the briefing tape, but he continued to smile into those brilliant eyes and it seemed that his smile was echoed back to him. It had been a long time for him, and his thoughts became more specific. Her body and his, meeting, blending . . . A horrified look appeared in the lovely eyes and she turned and ran into the shop. Well, you can't win them all, he thought wistfully.

He felt slightly dizzy and was turning to go back into the hospital when he saw Spock, McCoy and the Doctor coming out.

"Jim," said McCoy, "Have you seen Lt. Stephans?"

"Not yet, Bones." He replied, smiling.

Spock and McCoy exchanged glances of - irritation? Why should seeing Lt. Stephans be such an important matter?

"Blithering idiot," said the Doctor. "You'd better get back inside and let us look at you."

Kirk bristled. What right did the Doctor have to give such an order and, anyway, they could just as well look at him out here. . .

There was a commotion across the street. The four on the hospital steps turned.

Three men were approaching rapidly. Kirk saw the girl he had been looking at being bundled into a carriage with some other women.

The men paused, face to face now with the Doctor and the Enterprise crew. Kirk recognized one as the Norm who had been present at the meeting in the Techie capital.

The Norm looked at the Doctor. "You said that your people would abide by our customs."

"I did."

"This man," he motioned to Kirk, "has violated one of our women."

The Doctor seemed to take a deep breath. Spock and McCoy simultaneously exclaimed "Captain!" and "Jim!"

Kirk looked at them and, with a shock, realized that they seemed to be accepting the justification of the charge.

"Bones, Spock - I just got here!" He felt a wave of dizziness sweep over him.

"Time is relative, Captain," said the Doctor. He turned to the man who had stated the charge. "You are Raul d'Colm'n, head of the clan d'Colm'n, and you are making this charge."

"On behalf of my kinswoman, Namona d'Colm'n, I am."

"The one charged has the right of defense by challenge."

"With swords and knives." d'Colm'n looked scornfully at the Doctor.

"Will your clan accept the challenge of defense?"

"We will - and the best of our warriors will face this pervert personally."

"Where will the challenge be?"

"In the hall of the d'Colm'n. We will take the accused there now."

"I am leigelord to the accused. I shall go with him."

"It is your right. But only you as liegelord may do so. And you must leave all of your alien machines behind. We have extra horses; we will leave now. The challenge will be on the morrow."

Kirk found himself clinging to the sculpture. The dizziness seemed to be getting worse. Was this a dream?

The three d'Colm'n went back across the square. Kirk heard the sound of a tricorder behind him. He turned and saw McCoy and Spock looking at something on the screen of McCoy's tricorder. They both looked grim. The Doctor was coming out of the door carrying a sword and knife in a curious double scabbard and a leather jacket. He started for Kirk when McCoy stopped him.

Odd, the three seemed to be blurring - had he been drinking? They were talking. He heard the words but didn't want to bother trying to make sense out of them. The stone sculpture felt cool and comfortable.

"How serious is the challenge?"

"Very. Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it. He'll be back to you in two days."

Now that was the Doctor talking - he'd take care of it! He thought he could handle anything. Well, James Kirk could handle this, and his ship, and his crew, and his friends. He'd show them - handle this situation the way he had all the others there had been and everything would be fine.

The blurring seemed to be getting worse and he could barely recognize McCoy's shape coming toward him with a hypospray. He felt the hypospray going in, but nothing seemed to happen. The Doctor was putting a leather jacket on him. He tried to shrug it off. He wasn't cold; it was too hot on this damn planet. Spock's face suddenly came into focus and he realized that the Vulcan was pulling the jacket back on him.

"Jim?"

Was that Spock? He hadn't called him Jim in a long time. He tried to listen.

"Jim - you must do what the Doctor says. Do you understand?"

Kirk nodded. He felt Spock removing his phaser and communicator. Of course, even Spock wanted the Doctor to be in charge.

"Doctor, there is a problem."

The Doctor had been getting some medical supplies from McCoy and was stuffing them in his pockets.

"Problem, Spock?" Kirk felt the blue eyes focus on him. He turned away from the penetrating look. "If he doesn't cooperate, we will both be lost."

Spock turned back to Kirk who had now decided that he wouldn't look at any of them. The dizziness seemed to be passing, but the feeling of estrangement continued. He felt the Vulcan's hands grasping his head, turning it so they were face to face, the hands shifting into the mind-meld position.

"No, Spock!" Had he said that, or just thought it? The Vulcan's eyes, now close to his, seemed to soften, but he felt Spock's mind enter his.

You must return to us alive. You must do what the Doctor tells you to do.

He has turned all of you away from me. He is an enemy.

He is not an enemy. He is our friend.

He has fooled all of you. He has not fooled me.

Jim! You must not think that. Now, look back on what has happened. Review all of it. Is our friendship so fragile that you can no longer trust me?

I trust you.

Then trust the Doctor also. If you do not, we will never meet again.

Your word?

My word.

An alien touch - mind? - entered. *They are returning.*

Spock broke off the meld. "He is in your hands, Doctor."

The Doctor nodded.

The dizziness had gone now, and Kirk was able to get on the horse without help. As they rode off, the Doctor rode next to Kirk and they were both surrounded by armed men.

Raul led the group through rough paths and rocky trails. Kirk was spending most of his time trying to stay on the horse. He was thankful when they arrived at their destination.

A castle-like structure, heavily fortified, stood on top of one of the smaller mountains. He noticed banners flying from the turrets which matched the banners that several members of the party were carrying. A white sheep on a yellow and blue striped background with a bell inside a double ring in one corner seemed to be the emblem displayed.

"Why a sheep?" He could not resist asking the Doctor as they got off their horses in the courtyard of the castle.

The Doctor glanced at him. "You don't know the sheep on Lightunder. It is quite an appropriate emblem for this clan."

The armed men escorted them to a large chamber. They left and Raul stood facing the Doctor. Kirk's knees felt oddly weak again and he sat down in one of the high-backed chairs.

The little man looked up at the Doctor and said "While you are not of our people, we will give you the guesting appropriate to the challenge."

"You honor us," said the Doctor.

Raul looked over at Kirk. "Is your man not well?"

"It has been a long trip and he has drunk too heavily."

Raul seemed to be weighing the Doctor's words. Kirk debated protesting that he had not been drinking at all but the effort seemed too much.

"That is no excuse." Raul made the statement definitive.

"It was not given as one."

Raul nodded as though the answer satisfied him.

"Food will be sent. The challenge will be fought at cock's crow on the morrow. You will be summoned."

"Who will be fighting for the d'Colm'n?"

"I shall be."

"As is my right, I shall fight for my liegeman."

"As you wish. I would not have thought him worth it."

Raul turned and left the room. Kirk suddenly realized that he limped. Then the significance of the last remarks sank in and the lethargy was swept away.

"What do you mean, you're fighting for me? I can fight for myself!"

"Captain," the Doctor came over and forced Kirk back into the chair. He leaned over one arm. "How skilled are you at fighting with sword and knife?"

"I've used those weapons."

"Against the most skilled man on a planet which only uses those weapons?"

"Him?"

"Captain - you must not judge by appearances. For all his size and his injured leg, he is the best that this planet has produced. You could not win against him."

The dizziness seemed to be returning. Kirk shook his head, trying to clear it. "Can you?"

"Yes - most likely. It is our only chance. How do you feel?"

The words seemed to come out of a distance. Spock had said 'trust him'.

"Weak and dizzy. What's going on?"

The Doctor began rummaging in the pockets of his coat and pulled out one of McCoy's hyposprays. Kirk heard it hiss against his arm.

"That should help. I'll wake you when the food comes."

Kirk awoke to find himself supported by the Doctor's arm. He was lying in one of the beds. The Doctor was spooning some kind of broth into his mouth. He started to pull away but then relaxed.

"Well, I'm glad to see that Spock got through to you." The broth seemed to be finished and the Doctor offered Kirk a chunk of some type of whole grain bread and propped him up in the bed. "Eat as much of it as you can. You need the energy." The Doctor sat back in a chair and took out a bag of jellybabies.

"Doctor - what the hell is wrong with me?"

"You didn't see Lt. Stephans before you left the TARDIS, did you?"

"No. I . . ."

"You didn't really think that it was necessary. Well, because you didn't see her, you didn't receive the immunity injection you humans require for the current virus mutation that's floating around. So now you've caught the disease."

"Then the shots I've been getting are part of the cure."

"The shots aid in relieving the symptoms, but we have not yet found the cure. The mortality rate is 97%".

Kirk suddenly lost his appetite. The Doctor reached out and took the remaining bread out of his hand.

"You know, Captain, there are times when it pays to listen to someone you don't like."

"Doctor. . .I. . ."

"Don't try to excuse it, Captain. I can understand what happened, and I should have recognized it earlier. You're about to wind up your mission in a blaze of glory, when you get sidetracked into this." The Doctor made a vaguely circular motion with his hand.

"I certainly wasn't prepared for anyone like you."

The Doctor chuckled. "But surely, Captain, you must realize that one of the things I did, inadvertently, was to trigger some of the fears you have about what will happen when you do complete your mission."

"Changes."

"Yes - changes." the Doctor said cheerfully, "separation and loneliness. And you are so bound to your ship that the separation. . ." He became oddly pensive. "I think that you had better tell me what happened in the square that got us into this."

Kirk related the events as he recalled them, noticing that the dizziness and the fog seemed to be approaching again. As he finished his story he felt the hypospray against his arm.

The hissing sound of another hypospray awoke him in the morning.

"Doctor McCoy will not be thrilled with what I'm doing, but you've got to stay on your feet during the next several hours. Here, drink this." The Doctor held out a small vial of liquid. Without hesitating, Kirk drank it. The effect was immediate; a feeling of normalcy returned. He got out of the bed and saw that the Doctor was strapping on the double scabbard. He was wearing only the spotless, flowing white shirt, tweed pants, and boots. The rest of his clothes were laid in a neat pile. "Can you carry those?"

"Yes."

The Doctor pulled the sword from the scabbard and looked at it. It was a curious shape. One edge curved slightly while the other was straight. Both edges were honed to a fine sharpness. The strange blend of direct and curved line met in an elongated point.

"That's an unusual sword." Kirk commented.

"It's designed for great efficiency. Because of the curved edge, you gain an impetus to your blow if you decide to swing at your enemy - but the point still allows for the thrust." His voice seemed quite academic. "Do you see these grooves?" He indicated two channels in each side of the weapon. "If you should sink your weapon into your enemy to that depth and then quickly remove it, a suction is created - which causes an even greater loss of blood than in the flat sided weapon."

With a sudden intuition, Kirk said, "You don't like weapons, do you?"

"Aren't all men supposed to enjoy the fight?"

"You don't even travel armed - you were completely defenseless when you came out of the TARDIS."

"It has been my experience that if you go about armed, more people are apt to attack you than otherwise. You humans seem to feel an absolute compulsion to have some weapon or another on you."

"I think that for us it is a form of security - that we expect more attacks than welcomes. To leave all weapons behind - consistently - would be a step beyond our understanding of ourselves."

"I didn't think that you were a philosopher."

"Not a philosopher, but as a Starship Captain I have to have some understanding of my crew - and most of them are human, like me." Kirk smiled wryly.

The Doctor looked at Kirk with puzzlement and Kirk wondered what he had said that had surprised the Doctor in some fashion.

A knock sounded at the door.

"Our escorts." said the Doctor.

They were led down into a large circular hall. The seating around the sides, sloped so that all could have a good view, and the entrances from the front and back, reminded Kirk unpleasantly of the ancient Roman gladiatorial contests.

The Doctor and Kirk stepped onto the floor, their escorts falling back. The Doctor motioned to Kirk. "Stand back away from the combat area and do not interfere - whatever happens. If I am killed, they will be required to let you go."

"Then you are not certain about winning."

"Of course I am," said the Doctor huffily. "The probability that I can defeat Raul is at least - 90%." He seemed to think for a minute and then said with what seemed to Kirk to be an incorrigible honesty, "Well, 70% anyway." He started out for the center of the room and then turned back to Kirk, smiling. "At least it's 100% better than yours!"

As Kirk watched the Doctor turn and walk into the center, he realized that he was nearly laughing. All his fears and distrust of the Doctor seemed to have vanished. The Doctor was what he was - and that was worthy of all the trust that Spock and McCoy had placed in him, and that now Kirk would place in him too. If he had been the better swordsman, the Doctor would have made him fight his own battle. As it was, the Doctor would fight for him.

Raul emerged from the other door. He was dressed in full swordsman's outfit - leather, silver, the sword and the knife. The two men accompanying him stepped to one side and Raul, his green hair blazing, walked to the center.

A gong sounded and both men drew their weapons.

The fight began slowly, both men circling, taking cautious feints at each other, looking for weaknesses.

When the action finally began, Kirk had a few uneasy moments as the Doctor seemed to be outclassed as he faced the skill of a man trained to live and die with the bladed weapons. Then he noticed that the Doctor was consistently moving more rapidly than Raul, forcing Raul to turn on his injured leg. And while Raul was making frequent thrusts and passes at the Doctor, the Doctor rarely had to block them - he seemed to be moving one step ahead of his opponent. The, unexpectedly, the Doctor went on the offense, driving Raul around the floor. Within seconds, the Doctor gained the advantage. Kirk saw Raul fall, disarmed, with the Doctor's sword at his throat.

"Your life is forfeit to me and mine, Raul, and the innocence of my man is proved by your own laws."

"Then kill me quickly, in honor."

"In honor, I shall not do that. I would establish the truth of the matter - for all we have proved here is that I am a better swordsman than you. I will give you leave to probe the mind of my leigeman for the truth - if you will agree to verify it by putting your cousin Namona under the truthspell."

"This is not in accordance with our ways."

"Is death then more important to you than truth?" Raul glared at the Doctor. The Doctor's sword remained steadily at his exposed throat.

"I will grant you what you ask."

A murmur rose up around the hall. The Doctor moved his sword to one side and Raul stood.

"Quiet. It will be as I have said. Call forth your man." Raul turned. "Summon Namona and El Donna."

"Jim," the Doctor motioned Kirk to the center of the floor. He unbuckled the scabbard and let the weapons fall to the floor. Kirk moved quickly.

As he handed the Doctor his coats, he whispered "What's going to happen?"

"We'll let them find out what really happened." The Doctor shrugged into his longer outer coat, wrapped his scarf around his throat, and settled his hat on his head. "Raul will mind-probe you. Just concentrate on what happened. He isn't interested in anything else."

Namona, dressed all in white, eyes cast down, entered from the other side. With her was another woman, slither, darker, with a dilithium crystal worn in the hollow of her neck.

The two women joined the men in the center of the hall.

"El Donna," said Raul, "Place Namona under the truthspell."

"As you wish, Raul." The words were submissive but Kirk felt that had she so wished a refusal could as easily have been granted. She turned to Namona. "Child, look at me." Namona's eyes raised and as they met the other's the crystal at El Donna's throat pulsed with energy. Namona stood, eyes fixed on space. El Donna turned back to Raul. "It is done."

Raul faced Kirk. Kirk looked down into the dark eyes and was suddenly thankful that the Doctor had been the one fighting this man.

The mind contact was sudden and sharp, quite unlike the feeling Kirk had ever had with Spock. This was a knife burning in his mind. For a moment Kirk tried to resist. Then, remembering what the Doctor had said, he concentrated instead on the happening in the square.

The contact broke off. Kirk felt weakened and was thankful that the Doctor had moved over and taken his arm.

Raul turned to the wide-eyed girl. "So, then, is this how it was?"

Kirk felt that he could almost see the exchange between the two minds.

"Yes, it is as he remembers."

Raul's hand flew forward and Namona reeled under the blow.

Kirk started toward Raul, but the Doctor restrained him.

"Fool!" Raul turned to El Donna. "See that she is returned to the nursery for another year until she is prepared to live with adults."

"As you wish." El Donna motioned and two women came and removed the now sobbing girl.

Raul faced the Doctor and ceremoniously bowed. "All honor to you and your liegeman. My home is yours."

"Honor to you for being willing to make a change." The Doctor replied, bowing in return. He stood for a moment, looking at Raul questioningly. "If you can accept change, then I would talk to you for a moment before we leave."

"Very well." Raul called toward the door. "Rad!" A young man stepped forward from the group on the far side. "See that horses and an escort are provided for our guests. El Donna, while the liegelord and I speak, will you accompany the liegeman to the horses?" El Donna nodded her head in agreement. Raul turned back to the Doctor. "No doubt your liegeman will wish to check that everything is in order."

"No doubt," replied the Doctor wryly, glancing at Kirk.

The Doctor and Raul walked off together. Kirk noticed that while his legs still seemed to be stable, the fog had returned, edging his thoughts.

"Captain?" It was El Donna. "Will you please come with me? We can await Raul and the Doctor outside."

She turned and led the way through the building. As they reached the entrance, Kirk was thankful to see that there were some stone benches in front. The horses and escort were not yet there.

"May we sit while we're waiting?" Kirk asked.

El Donna nodded. He was thankful that she did not seem disposed to chatter, yet he wanted to ask some questions.

"You have questions, Captain?"

"Yes. If it would not be offensive. I do not understand all of your ways."

"I think that you understand very few of our ways, but you may ask your questions."

With an effort, Kirk tried to concentrate on the main point. The fog seemed to clear for a minute; he noticed that the crystal at El Donna's neck was glowing. "Why did Raul hit Namona?" God, he thought, that was blunt.

"A blunt question is preferable if it enables the appropriate answer. Raul hit Namona for two reasons. First, it is customary among our women - especially those with high powers - not to look at any man other than one's own family until after marriage. You seem shocked, Captain, but I can tell you that her bold glances of themselves would have been sufficient to require punishment. As it was, her worst crime was in claiming forced violation after she read your response to her given invitation."

"You're saying she read my mind? What I was thinking about her?" Kirk felt a sudden sinking feeling - his thoughts? - a mental rape - and they said she was guilty?

"But I did. . ."

"Captain." The lithe figure turned to him and dark eyes gazed sympathetically but with some hint of amusement into his. "Have you ever physically raped a woman?"

"No." Never had to, he thought and felt himself flush as he saw by the answering gleam in her eyes that she had caught that additional thought.

"Our custom of not looking at strange men is for our own protection. There are some whose thoughts would be without doubt - rape. Your thoughts, on the other hand - oh yes, Raul read them, so have we all - were flattering, stimulating, and exciting, for any woman who was the direct object of them. You are embarrassed. There is no need to be. We all have our passions and desires, and yours for Namona was not in any way perverted or debased. Her reaction, on the other hand, showed that she does not yet deserve to be called woman, but is still a child, and will now be treated so. What she did could have caused at least one needless death, had it not been for your liege lord. Can you understand this?"

It was strange but - "Yes. Although I must say that I will be thankful to leave this planet. I don't like the feeling that my mind is open to everyone."

"Not to everyone. That would be dishonorable, and exhausting for the true telepath. I have just been scanning your surface thoughts because it seemed that it would facilitate our conversation."

There was a clatter of hooves, and Kirk saw that the horses were being brought round. He wondered if he was going to be able to make it back. He felt the fog disappear and a soft strength enter his body. He turned to the woman beside him. Her eyes were closed and the jewel at her throat was pulsing. The dark eyes opened and looked into his. "You will make it back - and to your home." A gentle smile seemed to caress him. "I must go now. Raul and the Doctor are coming."

Kirk eyed the horses without enthusiasm. While he was feeling better, he was not a horseman. Somehow the thought of subjecting his still sore muscles to another trip on the beast was not appealing. Beside him he heard El Donna sigh. "This much too, then, Captain." He looked back down at her to see the crystal pulsing again.

"What?"

"It is a small thing, Captain. A gift from me to you. That you may have some not-so-unpleasant memories of this planet." The Doctor and Raul were coming out of the door. She turned and left.

"Coming, Captain?" said the Doctor as he moved past Kirk and mounted.

Kirk followed, getting on the horse behind the Doctor's. As he mounted, he realized that somehow his body seemed to know how to ride and handle the animal. Things fit - the double reins, the saddle and stirrups - he was a part of the animal. Kirk looked over to the doorway where El Donna was standing. An enigmatic smile was on her lips as the group rode away.

Riding through the hills he thought about her. The Doctor had pulled slightly ahead and was talking to the leader of their escorts, the young man Raul had called Rad.

Why was the armed escort needed, Kirk wondered. There had been no trouble on the way up and the countryside certainly seemed peaceful. Now, at mid-morning, there was not even the need for the leather jacket he had worn on the ride up.

A brilliant flash of light and shouting broke his thoughts. Phasers? The leading members of the party and their mounts had gone down. The Doctor was reining his horse sharply around. Without hesitation, Kirk followed.

"Rad," the Doctor called, "Get out of here!"

"We do not retreat!" Kirk saw that the remaining party were pulling out their swords, preparing to attack.

Swords against phasers? Kirk kicked his horse into a gallop and headed down the trail after the Doctor. The light flared again and the Doctor looked back. He shook his head and led the way off the trail into a rocky pass.

"Let the horses go. They'll be good decoys." The Doctor dismounted and gave his horse a slap on the rump, sending it on its way. Kirk quickly followed suit. As his horse galloped away, he followed the Doctor up the side of the mountain and joined him, crouching behind a large rock.

"What was that all about?"

"Daleks," said the Doctor grimly.

"Who are Daleks?"

"The ones who invaded this planet before. Apparently they left a small group behind to keep the pressure on as the bombs came down." The Doctor cautiously stood up and looked of the top of the rock. Kirk stayed down, watching him.

"You are the Doctor." A metallic artificial voice echoed from the rocks. The Doctor stood completely still, motioning Kirk to stay down.

"Exterminate the Doctor!"

"No. I wish to question him first."

At least two of them out there, Kirk thought. Probably more. There was an utterly vicious tone in the voices. The Doctor was moving around to the front of the rock. No time for plans or signals. Did the Doctor expect him to follow and attempt a rescue or leave?

"Put that down," said the metallic voices and a brief flair of light flickered among the rocks.

"It's only a toy," said the Doctor plaintively.

"You will come with us. You will keep your hands in sight. Now."

"Well, there's no need to shove."

Kirk heard noises as the group moved away. He peered cautiously around one corner of the rock. He could see the Doctor and four strange dome shaped metal creatures about five feet high moving down the path. He waited until they went around a bend and started to follow.

As he came out, he saw a mark on one of the rocks and, looking down, saw a yo-yo on the ground. He picked it up. A child's toy, but the Doctor had risked something to leave it. If the Doctor had done that, then there might be a purpose for it.

He continued to trail the Doctor and his captors. Some type of a robot - but with an independent mind, he thought. Certainly an eminently practical design, not at all anthropomorphic. The weaponry they used seemed to be built-in as one of the projections from the center of the bulletlike body. The other projection was probably a 'hand', although it bore no resemblance to anything humanoid. A third projection near the rounded top rotated as if the creature used it as an eye. He could not tell how they were moving. The

base of the body was so close to the ground that nothing could be seen. No wheels in this terrain - maybe some type of an air suspension system? However they had come about, their creation was inspired and, with the attitude they seemed to have, diabolical.

The group came to a circular stone structure. A brief noise and an opening appeared in one side and they went in. The opening closed. Some kind of a forcefield, he thought. He crept cautiously up to the sides. Solid rock, but the structure stopped about nine feet up. Where there's a wall, there's a way, Kirk thought and realized that the fog was pressing on his mind again. No, he thought, not yet, and pushed it back. These Daleks did not have feet or legs or real arms, so they might not be prepared for someone attacking from the top of the wall. He found hand and footholds in the rough rock and got to the top. He realized that he had carried the yo-yo in his mouth. Like a weapon, he thought. Could it become one?

Lying down flat on the top, he looked down inside. The Doctor was standing in the middle of the structure. A strange light surrounded him.

"Why have you come here?" asked one of the Daleks and the light around the Doctor changed color. The Doctor did not respond and the light flickered again. It seemed to be tightening on him. Another force field, Kirk thought.

"I was just looking around. What are you doing here?" The Doctor lifted his head and smiled at the nearest Dalek.

At least he was conscious, and if he was conscious, then if the forcefield could be removed. . . . Kirk moved slowly along the wall looking for some type of control panel inside the complex.

"I do not believe you. You will tell the truth."

"Exterminate!"

"No. He may have information we need." The light changed color again and Kirk heard the Doctor gasp. If he didn't act quickly, the Doctor would not be able to get out. Kirk spotted what looked like a control panel - switches, buttons, and flashing lights. He crawled so that he was directly above it. Now - one leap down. He glanced over at the Doctor to catch a definite glance that said 'no'.

"Do you still like blue?" said the Doctor to the Dalek who was questioning him.

"That is not an answer." The light changed again.

Blue? There was one panel glowing that color. Kirk looked at the Doctor and then realized that he still had the yo-yo in his hand. He lifted it. Heavy - maybe not just a normal yo-yo then. And on a string. Kirk smiled at it. Method in the Doctor's madness. He tied one end of the string to his finger and sent the weight down toward the panel. Missed. He pulled it back up and tried again.

"You will tell us what we wish to know."

"Difficult without breathing."

Kirk felt the weight rebound as the yo-yo hit the panel and broke it. The power over the complex died and Kirk saw the Doctor run for the opening. He slid off the wall as the Doctor ran around to meet him. The Doctor pulled him down behind another rock. "Stay here. They'll be looking for us to be running."

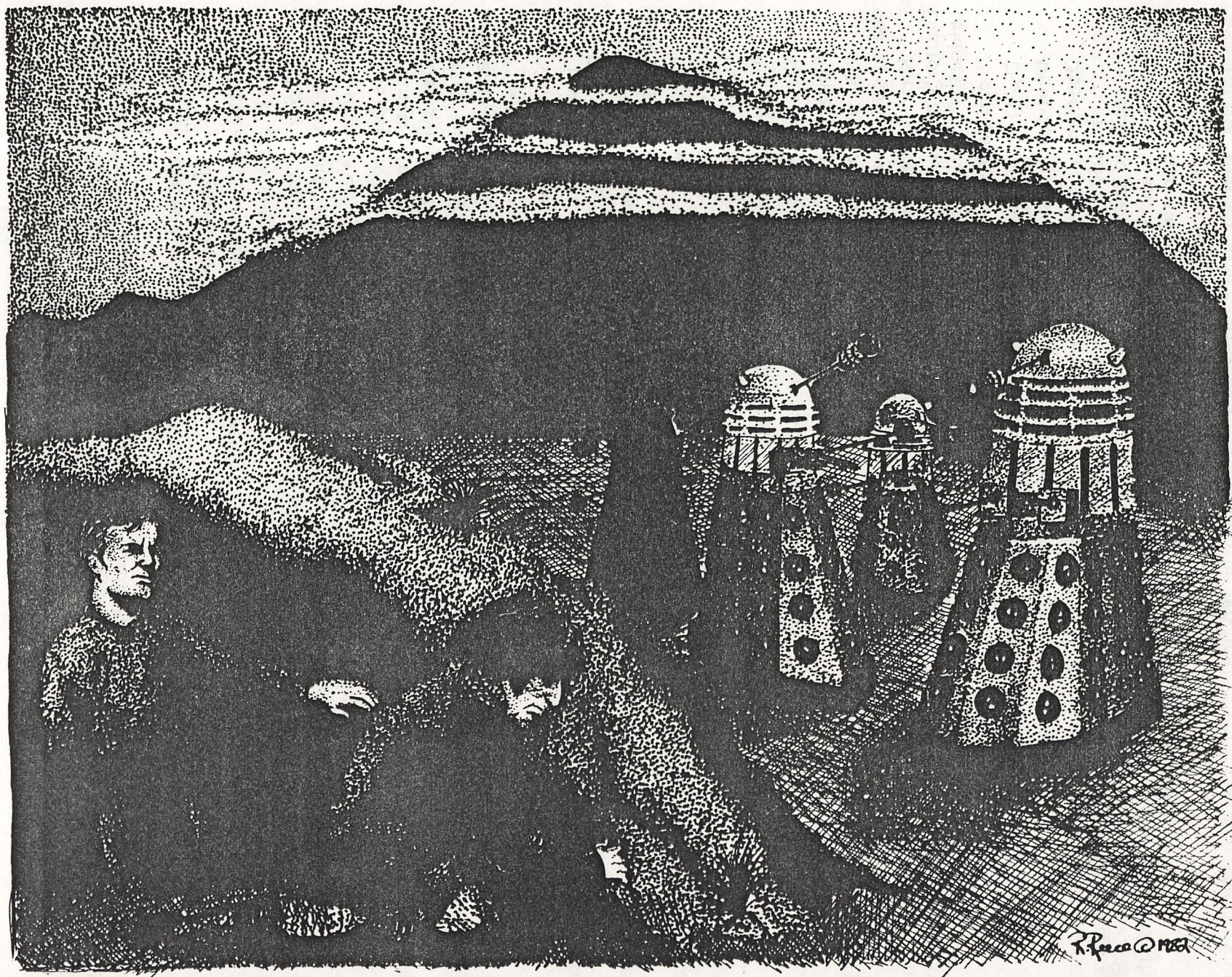
They remained hidden until dusk came, saying nothing. The Doctor motioned and Kirk followed him up further into the mountains. A small cave seemed to be an acceptable stopping place and the Doctor motioned Kirk inside. Kirk collapsed on one side and looked at the Doctor who was leaning against the other wall.

"Doctor," said Kirk, "Don't you know any nice people?"

The Doctor turned to Kirk. "Where did you learn to ride like that in one day?"

Kirk looked at him, suddenly at a loss. Oh no, he thought, he's off on a tangent. Still, the blue eyes looking into his were quite serious.

"I think that El Donna did something to me before we left."



R. R. R. R. R.

"Psychically?"

"I think so. I feel better and I did know how to handle that horse. I can't think of any other way for that to have happened."

"That last bit of riding probably saved your life. And now. . ."

Kirk waited patiently. The Doctor seemed to be in another world but now he could accept this as part of the way the alien mind worked. They were alone in a wilderness with no weapons or communication devices, pursued by Daleks. Anything the Doctor could think of would help.

"Do you have any psychic abilities?" the Doctor asked.

"No. I've always tested negative."

"Tests aren't always the whole answer."

"What are you thinking of doing?"

"There is one possibility." The Doctor stopped and looked down at his hands. Kirk realized that one of them had been burned by the Dalek's weapon.

"If there is any possibility, I'm willing to try it. What do you want me to do?"

The Doctor studied Kirk carefully as he said, "El Donna is the most powerful psychic on this planet. You have recently been in telepathic contact with her. For her to do what she did, she obviously felt some attraction to you." He stopped.

Kirk waited and when the Doctor did not continue said, "The problem is that I'm not a telepath, so I can't reach her."

"You're not a telepath."

"Can't you reach her?"

"I haven't had the contact I need to establish a link. I know of her - I don't know her." The Doctor seemed to be studying the side of the rock.

"Doctor, if you will tell me what you want me to do, I will do it." The Doctor looked at Kirk and smiled.

"What I want you to do is to try to reach El Donna mentally. I will tap into your mind, enable your signal - boost it, and then talk to her through your mind."

"You want me to be a link between the two of you?"

"A signal and a link. It will not be easy."

Kirk looked at the Doctor intently. He was still serious.

"Okay, let's try. What do I do?"

"Picture her in your mind. As clearly and accurately as you can. When the picture is sharp, call her name."

Kirk nodded and leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes. He felt one of the Doctor's hands resting lightly on his head. Odd, he thought, he could easily accept the idea of telepathy through touch, but over a distance. . .

It can be done.

The Doctor's thought in his mind was as unique as his voice. Not like Spock at all.

Mind-touch is a matchless means of identification. Think of El Donna.

Obediently, Kirk tried to remember her. The dark eyes, the smile, the tilt of her head, the mass of dark green hair, the image swirled in his mind but he could not seem to stabilize it. He realized that he was breathing more rapidly and the Doctor's hand dropped away. He opened his eyes and looked at the Doctor. The Doctor was looking at the opposite wall of the cave. He seemed almost discouraged. Damn, Kirk thought, we can't give up now.

"Try again?" he said lightly.

"Do you feel up to it? This may turn out to be physically painful to you, and in your present condition. . ."

"I'll make it."

He closed his eyes again and felt the Doctor's hand come back on his head. He summoned the image again. It came, moving, refusing to become firm. He felt weak. No wonder Spock was leary of using the mind-meld if it was as tiring as this. Come on, he thought, when have you ever had trouble remembering a pretty face?

Something is missing. The Doctor thought.

Missing?

Kirk tried not to look at the image but to think about the woman he had just left.

The crystal. He thought at the Doctor.

Of course, the crystal is part of her.

Kirk grabbed the floating image and placed the dilithium crystal at her neck. Immediately the image became sharp and clear. As if she was in his mind, looking at him. He felt the Doctor's mind move in his.

Now - call her!

El Donna. . . El Donna!

Without warning, another mind touched his. He felt his body double over in spasm and the Doctor's other hand catch and cradle his head.

Captain? Why are you calling me?

The spasm seemed to ease slightly as he felt her mind settle into his.

The Doctor needs to talk to you.

The Doctor? Your liegelord?

Yes. Here. . .

Kirk felt the Doctor's mind move forward and meet El Donna's. Now he could sit back and let these two handle it.

The invaders - the Daleks - are still here. A rear guard, in the mountains.

So, the machines have not gone.

They have killed our escort. We must join now to destroy them.

Before myself and others of the greatest power joined with the machine lovers - those whom you call the Techies. Now the others of the Power who joined with me are gone. Our powers are diminished. Our weapons cannot equal theirs. What can we do??

It is possible that an avalanche could be triggered on their camp. Do you have enough of the Power left to do that?

I would need the assistance of others. They will have to come from afar. It will take time.

Kirk felt himself being stirred from his bystander role.

Doctor. He could sense that his body was objecting to the effort it was taking to enter the conversation.

What?

You are not alone in this.

What do you mean?

There is the Enterprise.

The Doctor did not respond.

Had you forgotten?

What about your Prime Directive?

To hell with the Prime Directive!

He could feel the Doctor's laughter and it somehow made the pain in his body ease.

Captain, I think I like you.

Can we reach her?

Who is this Enterprise? El Donna questioned sharply.

It is his ship.

Strange - to love a machine so.

Doctor. Kirk realized that if they did not act quickly his body would collapse from the effects of the linking. *Can we reach Spock?*

Image him for me, Captain, and I shall reach him. El Donna's mental voice was brisk and quite matter-of-fact.

Kirk again tried to summon a mental image. This time, Spock. He felt his muscles quivering as if he had been running too long.

With this image I can help. The Doctor's mind swept into his.

The image he had been striving for sharpened, became clear.

Captain, I can drop you from the link now.

No Doctor. This time he was the one laughing. *If you want the Enterprise to fire her phasers on this planet, I have to give the order.*

It it costs you your life?

If it does - then it does. He felt his muscles contract again.

Captain. . . as you wish it.

One part of his mind seemed to feel the Doctor holding him, the other brought the image of Spock into focus again.

El Donna. The Doctor called. *The image - can you reach this man?*

Yes.

And Spock was there.

Captain - Jim?! Spock's mind seemed reassuringly familiar.

Spock. Full phasers . . El Donna's mind was there, linked with the Doctor's and coordinates appeared in his mind.

Captain - the Prime Directive?

Spock - No good to give Spock the answer that had so readily satisfied the Doctor. *The Daleks, the ones who invaded this planet before - still here - they're the violators.* He felt his body spasm violently again and knew that the three minds in his felt it too.

Jim! Doctor, get him out of this!

My decision, Spock. You have your orders.

And the world slid away.

He came to to find himself lying on the floor of the cave wrapped in Doctor's coat. The Doctor was standing at the entrance looking out.

"Doctor?" He tried to lift his head.

The Doctor moved back and made him lie down.

"Don't try to move. You won't have the strength. Don't even try to talk. Spock will never forgive me if I don't get you back safely."

Kirk took a deep breath. The Doctor was right. He didn't have any strength left.

"You missed the fireworks. That's the easiest time I've ever had with Daleks."

Odd, Kirk thought, he would have thought that the Doctor would be exuberant, but he seemed strangely subdued. He was taking a metal object out of his pocket - the sonic screwdriver Scotty had been trying to analyze.

"I'm setting this to a signal your transporter will be able to home in on. We should be having company soon." He smiled at Kirk as a small section of the screwdriver seemed to extend. "At least you won't have to ride a horse back."

There was the familiar shimmer of the transporter beam and Spock and McCoy were there. McCoy moved quickly over to Kirk, the medical tricorder going. From the look on his face Kirk knew that the results were not good.

"Is this from that damned mind-meld of yours?" McCoy said, turning to the Doctor who was undeniably looking guilty. Kirk caught Spock's eye.

"Doctor McCoy, the decision to attempt the telepathic contact was the Captain's."

"He couldn't have known it would have this effect!"

"Bones," Kirk felt that he had to stop the argument. What was done was done. "It was my choice." He had to stop to take another deep breath. "Check the Doctor."

McCoy looked at him for a minute and then swung the tricorder over toward the Doctor. Kirk nearly laughed as he saw the burned hand disappear into a coat pocket.

"I'm fine," said the Doctor defiantly.

"Like hell you are. You've got second degree burns on your right hand, three broken ribs and what amounts to a punctured lung."

"I feel fine." The Doctor smiled at McCoy.

"Ha! At least this time I can treat you properly. And that's what I'm going to do!"

"Doctor McCoy," Spock interrupted, "I would suggest that we return to the hospital with your patients." Kirk closed his eyes again as he saw the Vulcan bending down to pick him up. In spite of the gentleness of the touch, he was unconscious again in seconds.

His next memories were nightmares. Strange but familiar faces hovering over him shouting, "Hang on, Captain, hang on, Jim, hang on. Hang on." Damn it, he was hanging on! He sensed a presence that was not shouting. He opened his eyes to see Spock standing by his bed.

"Thanks" he said.

"Captain?"

"You're not shouting."

"What did he say?" Another presence - he turned his head - the Doctor. He looked around the room. Still on the planet, well, that was where all the medical people were.

"He said something about shouting." Spock seemed puzzled.

"Shouting?" He closed his eyes again. "No one's been shouting in here."

"Maybe not. Your medical indicators are showing an improvement now. Lt. Stephens! Come in here!"

The shouting started again. Worry, concern, fear echoing in his mind. "What's happened, what's wrong?"

"See there! Now, Lieutenant, get out of here."

The shouting stopped.

"Spock, with the changes in the DNA patterns. . ."

"Uncontrolled telepathy. . ."

"Why we're losing all the children. . ."

He opened his eyes again to see Spock and the Doctor staring at each other. The Doctor smiled and Spock nodded. They turned to leave the room and the Doctor turned back.

"Don't worry, Captain, there won't be anymore shouting."

And there wasn't. From his accidental remark the two had been able to link the effect of the infection to the use of uncontrolled psychic abilities - a relationship that had McCoy

muttering for days.

When McCoy was satisfied that the raging viral infection had finally been routed, Kirk was pronounced well enough to be beamed back to the ship and the treatment of the medical crew still on board. Watching the medical team making preparations to transport him up, he rejoiced in being able to think clearly again even though lifting a hand was exhausting. Then he had a thought. "Bones." At least speaking wasn't so bad. McCoy came over and stood by the bed.

"Jim, don't try to talk. It'll be quite a while before you get your strength back."

"It's okay. I want to talk to Spock."

McCoy looked at him with relief. "Well, I suppose you'll cause more trouble if I don't let you see him. You can have one minute." He went out the door and came back with Spock. "One minute, that's all."

"Of course, Doctor." Spock said and looked quizzically down at Kirk.

"Spock, I do not want the Doctor to leave until I get to talk to him." Kirk looked up at Spock intently.

"Indeed, Captain?"

"I think he might try to slip away without - saying goodbye. I have to talk to him before he goes."

Spock smiled slightly and Kirk was relieved to see that some of the influence of the Doctor's mind-melding was still at work. At least he wasn't going to get a lecture on the illogic of wanting to say goodbye.

"Captain, Mr. Scott has not yet completed the design for the extra dilithium crystals. Even with the Doctor's help it will take at least two days. I am quite certain that the Doctor will not leave until the engineering is completed."

"Very good, Spock. Just have him see me before he goes."

"I will see to it, Captain."

Kirk smiled as his first officer turned and left. McCoy was right. Spock was easier with himself than he ever had been. Still, after the Doctor left, and they returned to their universe and the effect of the meld had worn off - could there be a whiplash effect to this? He thought about it as the medical team transferred him to the stretcher and the transporter brought them up to the Enterprise. He would have to talk to McCoy about it. If Spock suddenly took it into that Vulcan head of his that behaving as he had been was aberrational, Spock could wind up throwing away everything he had finally started to put together. Kirk wondered if there were any nut cults on Vulcan - probably not. Still, with Spock's tour of duty coming to an end, he would be quite free to leave Starfleet. Well, whatever Spock decided, he'd back him. At any rate, he thought, as they transferred him to the bed in Sickbay, he wasn't going to be physically fit to command a starship for some time. And his hair was falling out. He felt a hypospray against his arm and as he fell asleep thought of the Doctor blithely saying "Changes."

The next day Kirk awoke from a catnap to see McCoy standing by the bed.

"Good morning." McCoy said.

"Is that what it is? I've lost track."

"It's not surprising."

"Was it that bad?"

"We nearly lost you."

Kirk looked at McCoy and smiled. After a moment McCoy smiled back. "I'm getting too old for these close calls." McCoy paused for a moment. "I'm also getting too old to get used to another Spock."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Did anything - unusual - happen on that little trip you took with the Doctor?"

"Nothing you don't know about. I've listened to the Doctor's report and it's quite accurate. Why?"

McCoy shook his head. "I can't tell you anything specific, but I'm positive that something happened that wasn't reported." The events of these last days on Lightunder were unexpectedly replaying in his mind.

After getting Kirk settled, McCoy found that his other patient had disappeared. He was not really surprised. The Doctor had demonstrated that he had as strong an aversion for being confined for treatment as Kirk and Spock. He finally tracked him down in one of the TARDIS' laboratories. He and Spock were studying the results of the most recent gram isolation tests.

"Doctor," McCoy said, "if you can tear yourself away for about two hours, I can treat you and send you back to work."

"I've got more important things to do," the Doctor snapped irritably. Spock looked at the Doctor with surprise.

"Doctor, it is illogical for you to assume that you can work with normal efficiency while you are in pain."

"Pain? Don't be ridiculous - my body heals very rapidly and lying around won't speed things up at all."

McCoy looked at the readings on his medical tricorder and was about to respond to the Doctor's statement when Spock stood up and walked over to the Doctor. "While Dr. McCoy's medical treatment is quite primitive, I do not think that he will simply have you recline in a passive state and wait for your own healing process to function. Now are you going to accompany him?"

"Spock, I'm fine. I don't need any medical treatment. I've got work to do." The Doctor turned back to the electronic projection he had been studying.

Spock glanced at McCoy. In response to the uplifted eyebrow McCoy just shook his head. He disliked reluctant patients, but there was no denying what his medical instrumentation was telling him. 'Primitive' it might be according to Vulcan or Time Lord standards, but he had seen the Doctor's normal readings and what was indicated now was far from anything resembling those.

With one fluid motion, Spock administered the Vulcan neck pinch and caught the Doctor as he fell.

"Very efficient, Spock. Let's get him into the medical treatment area."

One of the rooms in the TARDIS had been converted into an emergency treatment area. The portable equipment from the Enterprise which had been installed there enabled McCoy to treat almost any emergency. It only took a few minutes to remove the Doctor's outer coats and his shirt and get him on the treatment table. McCoy was thankful that the Doctor remained unconscious. In the mood he was in, he would have been loudly protesting the whole time. As much as McCoy disliked reluctant patients, he disliked noisy reluctant patients even more. By the time the Doctor was conscious, he had completed his analysis of the damaged area involving the Doctor's rib cage and was calibrating the Bertod Ray Attenuator that would enable a rapid mending.

"The Platysternidae is a slow moving creature." The Doctor said. His blue eyes focused accusingly on Spock. "You did something to me."

"It is quite illogical for you to attempt to work in a physical condition that is below normal." Spock replied quite calmly. The Doctor looked ready to dispute Spock's statement when McCoy intervened. "Now, Doctor, there's no sense in getting angry at Spock."

"Angry? I never get angry." The Doctor said, clipping the ends of his words in a brusque, precise manner. "Even when people interfere with what I want to do, I don't get angry!"

"Well then, you're doing the best imitation of a man about to get very angry that I've ever seen." McCoy turned the Attenuator on. "If Spock hadn't dropped you, I would have." The Doctor looked at McCoy in surprise. "I can lay my hands on at least ten things now that'll put you to sleep like a baby and when, in my medical opinion, Doctor, you need to be treated in order to remain a viable part of this team, I will not hesitate to use them. You may be the Doctor, Doctor, but I have the full medical responsibility for this team and I will not evade that responsibility by allowing any member to go off on some masochistic ego trip and ignore his body's own natural warning signs! Now since your body is so much better than a human body, it may not even take two hours to heal under the Berthod ray - but you are going to stay here until Nurse Chapel confirms that your ribs and lung have healed. Now let me see that hand."

The Doctor had listened to McCoy with an awed fascination and promptly held his hand out. "Bones," he said, a wicked grin unexpectedly lighting up his face, "When you were in Medical School, what sort of a grade did you get in 'bedside manner'?"

McCoy heard a noise behind him and, turning, saw that Spock was leaving the room. Chris Chapel seemed to be intensely studying the lower panel of the Attenuator. He ran the medical tricorder over the Doctor's burned hand. "Y'know, I never heard that 'bedside manner' was related to medical skill." He looked at the Doctor. "That's a nasty burn."

"The Daleks do not have a reputation for being nice." The Doctor looked tired.

"This won't hurt, but your hand may be a little stiff until it heals." McCoy sprayed the burned area and put the Doctor's hand down. He glanced at the bruised area on the Doctor's side and noted with pleasure that the discoloration had already begun to fade. "Now I know you're going to get edgy just lying there, so I'm going to give you a sedative that will keep you quiet for about an hour. By the time you wake up, you'll be back to normal."

The Doctor did not protest as McCoy administered the hypospray. "Bones, I wish. . ."

"Wish what?"

"You know," from the Doctor's voice, McCoy could tell that the medication was taking effect. "No one gets too old to learn a new way of being stupid." McCoy looked at the now sleeping figure in puzzlement. He had no idea what occasioned that remark, and he knew that any attempts to pursue it would be rebuffed.

During the next several days, McCoy became convinced that the Doctor was determined to demonstrate his superiority over the human members of the team. He worked without sleep, running test after test, trying to find a clue to the control of the deadly elusive virus. The only sign of fatigue that McCoy could pinpoint was that his joking remarks were devolving into the lowest level of humor.

Each day saw Kirk's condition worsen.

When the Doctor and Spock happened on the causal relationship between the effect of the virus and the uncontrolled use of psychic abilities, McCoy was convinced that they were now in complete control of the situation. The Doctor's natural exuberance returned as patient after patient was successfully treated.

McCoy could not enter the room where Kirk lay isolated, but he was waiting outside while the Doctor and Spock administered the treatment. After a longer time than any of the other patients had required to respond, the Doctor emerged alone. His face was deadly serious. He looked at McCoy and said, "He's not responding."

"Not at all?"

"Not worse - but not at all better."

"Even if he doesn't get worst, he can't. . ."

"Three hours - maybe four." The fatigue that McCoy had been expecting was suddenly there in his voice.

"Come on, Doctor, I think we'd better sit down."

The Doctor did not protest as McCoy led him into a nearby vacated room. Once inside, however, another frantic burst of energy caused him to pace back and forth in the narrow space between the bed and the wall.

"It should have worked. Every test, every calculation - every other patient proved it." He stopped and turned to McCoy. "He's an unusual man - your Captain." He glared at McCoy as if daring him to dispute the statement.

"He is." McCoy stated calmly. There didn't seem to be any sense in both of them getting upset. "He'll be the first Starship Commander to complete a five-year mission with ship and crew virtually intact."

"The first?" The Doctor looked surprised. "Why?"

"Because he knows when to go by the book - and when to throw it out."

"And we're going to lose him here." He turned to the door and McCoy was not surprised to see Spock come in. Spock was carrying one of the Enterprise's recording tablets and the skin on his face was tight against the bone. The Doctor reached out and took the tablet from Spock's hand. He looked at the notes and with a suddenness that made McCoy jump, flung the tablet to the floor. He looked at it laying there and then looked at Spock.

"I know," he said, as if in response to an unspoken comment. "It doesn't change anything. But then again," he smiled wryly, "What's the point of being grown up if you can't be childish?"

"Jim?" McCoy whispered.

"Still alive. But the treatment is definitely ineffective." Spock's voice was level as always, but McCoy recognized that it was not because of a lack of feeling.

"Now what?" McCoy asked.

"Try something else." The Doctor bent to pick up the tablet. "There's always something else."

"For what?" McCoy looked over to see Lt. Stephens standing in the door behind Spock. "I don't mean to interrupt, but it sounded as though someone was throwing things around."

"The Captain seems to be immune to the only treatment we have." The Doctor said bluntly. "Don't you want to throw something around?"

"If it would help, I would. However, I don't think I could be of much more help than that here."

Spock and the Doctor exchanged swift glances. "Explain," Spock said.

"My field is Xenobiology - the Captain's human. . ."

Spock's eyes lit up and the Doctor shouted "That's it!" With a leap he was shaking her hand and patting her exuberantly on the back. "Good girl," he said, beaming at her.

"Doctor," McCoy said, "knowing why Jim doesn't respond to the treatment doesn't help us find a treatment he will respond to."

"Logically. . ." Spock said.

"Oh pooh," interrupted the Doctor. "Logic is the science of going wrong with confidence. We've got the same disease, curable in individuals of the same species and intractable in an individual of another species. All we have to find is the denominator of difference."

"Exactly." Spock said. The Doctor looked at him and laughed. McCoy and Stephens smiled at each other.

"Now then," the Doctor said, "We have our best research sources right here." With one swift movement he had McCoy and Stephens seated next to each other on the bed and perched himself backwards on a chair opposite them. He glanced at Spock and Spock pulled

up a chair and sat down too. McCoy looked at them. One was sitting in a proper and correct fashion, leaning forward slightly with interest. The other was sprawled over and around the wrong side of the chair. Like two sides of a coin, he thought and glanced at Lt. Stephens, wondering if the same thought had occurred to her. He couldn't tell if it had. She was looking straight at the Doctor. Even her shoulder length copper colored hair was completely still.

"Now then," said the Doctor, "What do we know about this virus?"

"Its effectiveness is directly linked to the use of psychic abilities." McCoy answered.

"The uncontrolled use of psychic abilities." Spock added.

"Exactly," commented Lt. Stephens. "An individual with no active psychic ability - or a superior control - only contracts a mild case and recovers rapidly."

"We haven't had many of those!" McCoy said.

"That's strange," said the Lieutenant, "I don't recall that the Captain was ever identified as even marginally psychic."

"He isn't - or he wasn't," McCoy said. "Now, the problem seems to be that what ability he does have is literally feeding the virus."

"But most of the adult Lightunder people we've seen have managed to pull through. The major problem has been with the children - both in catching the virus and combating it." said the Doctor.

"Not just 'children', Doctor," Lt. Stephens continued. "Specifically, the break occurs exactly with the completion of puberty."

McCoy looked at her in surprise. He hadn't realized that she had had the time to do any research into the basic biological cycles on Lightunder.

"Quite right, Dorcy. Now, can you detail the differences during this time between Lightunderans and humans?" asked the Doctor.

The Lieutenant nodded and abruptly stared into a corner of the room. McCoy looked at her in increasing astonishment.

"Doctor McCoy," Spock said dryly, "I believe we are about to see an example of Cultural Survey and Contact's new eidectic memory control training."

"Difference during pubertal transition - Lightunder and Terra." The Lieutenant's voice had flattened somewhat but there was obviously a human control over the generation of the data. The Doctor beamed at her with pleasure. "Onset of puberty in the Lightunder humanoid causes a flux in the production of an adrenaline-like hormonal substance. As production ebbs, the individual's psychic abilities, when present, overcome the natural balance and cause dizziness, spacial disorientation, hallucinations, and, in extreme cases, death. As the flux stabilizes to the adult level, the individual gradually acquires a somewhat variant control over the now active psychic abilities." She blinked and looked at the Doctor expectantly. "Does that sound helpful?"

"What's the chemical formula for this substance?" McCoy asked.

" $CN_3H_2O_2$ bonded in a tri-nitrous base of BC_2C_4 ."

McCoy felt his heart sink. He shook his head. "Any mixture like that would kill the Captain as surely as the virus is." The four of them sat in silence. McCoy felt a sudden empathy for the Doctor's desire to throw things.

"But it's still a question of control." Spock said, leaning forward in his chair. "If the psychic abilities that the captain has could be controlled in some other way. . ."

"Of course!" McCoy said. "If one of you could duplicate the chemical effect in a non-chemical fashion. . ." Spock and the Doctor looked at each other. "Can you do it?" He knew the answer from the look on the Doctor's face.

"No," Spock said.

The Doctor shook his head. "I seem to be good at starting things, but stopping them - that takes tremendous power under superb control." His voice was bleak.

"Isn't there someone on this planet who could?" The Lieutenant asked in a level voice.

The Doctor's face brightened. "El Donna!" he said gleefully.

"Of course," Spock said. "She could do it - but will she?"

The Doctor hesitated for a moment. "Yes, I think she will. She took a liking to your Captain. I expect most people do." His voice had the same edge of defiance McCoy had heard before. This time the Lieutenant picked it up and glanced questioninglly at McCoy. McCoy shrugged his own puzzlement.

"Can she be reached quickly? Our time is increasingly limited." Spock looked at the Doctor.

"I think I can get her attention - with your help." Spock nodded and the Doctor got up.

"If you two are going to link up again, Doctor, you'd better lie down." McCoy said.

"Oh, well, if you think so."

"I think so, Doctor," said Spock.

The Doctor laid down on the bed. Spock sat on one side and placed his hands in position on the Doctor's head. The Doctor smiled at Spock and closed his eyes. McCoy took a deep breath as he walked around to the foot of the bed and watched them establish their mental communication. It might be 'natural' to them, but it seemed to set his teeth on edge. It was something beyond his control, and it made him nervous. He opened his medical tricorder and, hearing a hum behind him, realized that the Lieutenant had started hers.

"Monitoring the Doctor," she said.

McCoy turned his tricorder on Spock and winced as he watched the medical graphic display.

"They're both on the edge of exhaustive collapse." The Lieutenant remarked.

The readings on McCoy's tricorder went suddenly askew and he recognized the pattern he had seen before when the two had melded.

"They're in the meld now," he said. "I didn't hear Spock say anything."

"He doesn't need to any more with the Doctor. If they were together much more, this kind of thing would be routine. Both hearts stabilizing rates."

"Blood pressure normal. Alpha and Gamma waves peaking."

Spock took his hands away from the Doctor's head and turned to McCoy. "She's on her way."

McCoy looked at the Doctor. He was lying very still and his eyes were still closed.

"She and her escort will be teleporting here. The Doctor is acting as a location beam."

There was a multicolored burst of light near the bed and, with a slight popping noise, a woman and two men appeared. The Lieutenant quickly shut off her tricorder and McCoy followed suit. Damn! but she was lovely, McCoy thought. Petite, with a slim lithe figure, great dark eyes, a mass of curly dark green hair set off by a floor length flowing yellow gown, and a glow that gave her a regal presence. The Doctor got up from the bed.

"El Donna," he said respectfully.

One of the armed men with her stepped forward. McCoy recognized him - Raul d'Colm'n.

"We have come at your request, Time Lord, to handle that which you cannot," Raul said.

"Raul, you will speak no more of this. I have already spoken with the Doctor on it." A faint but decisive hint of command in El Donna's beautifully modulated voice brooked no hint of defiance. Raul stepped back.

"Your pardon." He bowed to the Doctor.

The Doctor brushed the apology aside. "The Captain is in here." He started toward the door. "Some of our medical machines are also in the room."

Raul started to speak but El Donna interrupted. "He is yours - not ours. The machines will not interfere."

"Spock," said McCoy, "Would it be possible for me to be there?"

Before Spock could answer, El Donna turned and looked up at McCoy. The Crystal at her throat was glowing dimly. "You are his friend and his physician. You may be with us. And you?" She looked at the Lieutenant.

"El Donna, I would have no reason to be there save curiosity."

"An admirable trait, but not to be indulged on this occasion." The two women smiled at each other and the selected group left the room.

They entered Kirk's room and El Donna stepped close to the bed. McCoy looked at his friend and then up at the medical indicators for reassurance. The body in the bed was emaciated, the hair thinning, no visible sign of life. Yet the medical indicators showed that Kirk was still alive.

The Doctor walked around to the other side of the bed, glanced down at Kirk and then looked at El Donna. She did not look at the medical indicators; her gaze was fixed on Kirk. McCoy swallowed convulsively and realized that Spock was standing next to him. The tension in the room was palpable.

El Donna stretched her hands out over the bed, palms down. McCoy could see a pulsing glow from the dilithium crystal at her neck. A phosphorescent swirling fog seemed to appear between her hands and Kirk's body. She moved her hands and the glow followed them, spiraling in a tumbling pattern between her hands and Kirk's head. For a moment the flow seemed to hesitate and Raul raised his hand to his head, the crystal on his wrist glowing. The flow stabilized then, moving in a pulsing rhythm toward Kirk and then, abruptly, flowing back. Three times it pulsed between the two. McCoy noticed that the eerie glow seemed to be growing brighter. Then its movement from Kirk to El Donna's hands slowed. McCoy had a feeling that this time it was pulling something with it. It suddenly broke free and dissipated its brilliance around the room.

Kirk's body heaved with a convulsive spasm. McCoy started for the bed, but the Doctor was closer and the Doctor was the one who held the body as the spasm subsided.

McCoy looked at the medical monitors. Their message was clear; Kirk was now winning the battle. The antidote had taken effect. He felt a hand grab his arm. It was Spock.

"He's made it, Spock." McCoy whispered.

The Doctor, still holding Kirk, looked at McCoy and Spock.

"Bravo!" he said with a smile to El Donna as he lay Kirk down again and stood up.

With a start, McCoy realized that El Donna's eyes were full of tears.

"That is a terrible thing that I have done for you, Time Lord. Had you summoned me earlier, I could have left the power with him. Now he is totally bereft."

"El Donna," said Spock, "the Captain will not miss what he never knew he had - and you have saved his life."

"For my people, Mr. Spock, what he has lost is more than life. It may come back in time, but it is still a death and destruction now."

"He is alive." The Doctor said.

"That is because of your choice, not his. You stand as his liege lord and you must answer to him for it. You speak of change, Time Lord, and urge such change on us - but will you be prepared for the change that you must face?" Without waiting for a reply, El Donna stepped back between her two escorts and, with a hissing noise, they disappeared.

As they disappeared, McCoy heard the Doctor take a deep breath and Spock moved quickly over to the bed and looked down at Kirk.

"Pompous, puffed-up psychics!" said the Doctor. "Always having the last word. What does she know. . ."

"Doctor, " said Spock. "I thank you."

"You're not everyone, Spock."

"She is not the Captain," Spock replied.

"Neither is she speaking for me or any of the others on the Enterprise." McCoy said. He didn't like the look on the Doctor's face. He had a sudden hunch that if the Doctor could have left in his TARDIS at that moment he would. "That the Captain is alive now - and that we're all going to be able to return to our own universe is because of you."

"Because of me?" The Doctor said in surprise. "Oh nonsense - anyone could have. . . well, almost anyone. . ." McCoy shook his head, smiling. "If you two don't have anything better to do, I'd like to get on with taking care of my patient."

"Doctor," said Spock, "I beleive that Mr. Scott has encountered some difficulty in the design for the use of those additional dilithium crystals." Spock turned and walked toward the door. After hesitating a moment, the Doctor joined him. "We also need to begin the disengagement of the computer link between. . ."

McCoy watched them leave and resisted the impulse to tell them both to get some rest. He took out his tricorder and began to analyze Kirk's condition.

"I can see that that's an experience you don't want repeated, Bones." Kirk said. "But what makes you say that the Doctor is like Spock?"

"Well, I know he was hurt by what El Donna said. And I'm equally as sure that something else happened to him on the trip with you." Kirk shook his head in puzzlement. "I don't think that he quite accepted what I said," McCoy continued, "but since then I haven't been able to get to him to try and convince him that I really mean it."

"Why not?" Kirk was perplexed. The Doctor had always seemed to be quite accessible.

"Y'know how Spock uses that 'I am a Vulcan' bit when he wants to shut you out?" Kirk nodded. "Well, I may be completely out of line, but I'd be willing to bet that the Doctor uses that clown act of his in the same way. You can't really touch him with a ten foot pole."

"So you're frustrated."

"Well, I keep reminding myself that he's not a member of our crew, and he's apparently quite capable of taking care of himself, but. . ."

"He's a friend." McCoy nodded in agreement. "And you don't like to see your friends hurt." Kirk was beginning to feel tired again.

"You'd better get some more sleep." McCoy said. "One other thing, though, what did El Donna mean by the Doctor having to face a change?"

"I don't know Bones - it sounds as though she is seeing something that the Doctor is going to have difficulty dealing with." Kirk recalled the Doctor going off with Raul after the duel. "I suspect that he's been trying to get their culture to accept the changes the war has made them face - and I don't think she approves of that."

The next day McCoy announced that the Doctor had come to see him before leaving.

"Spock said you wanted to see me, Captain," announced the Doctor as he swept into the room and sprawled into the chair next to Kirk's bed. In spite of the words, Kirk sensed that some of the surging exuberance was repressed. He looked carefully at the man in the bulky clothes slouched in the chair. The Doctor seemed to be studying his shoes.

"Doctor." The head came up and the blue eyes stared at him warily. The look was familiar. "Doctor," he said, shaking his head and laughing, "you are a fraud!" The Doctor's eyes widened in astonishment. "For all your carrying on, you don't like emotional scenes any more than Spock does. You're embarrassed!"

"I am never embarrassed." replied the Doctor haughtily.

"Of course not." Kirk smiled. "Then you're not going to object if I apologize to you."

"Apologize?"

"I misjudged you and I do most sincerely regret that."

"Oh that," the Doctor got up and walked over to the monitor by the other bed. Still facing away from Kirk, he said, "It's very difficult to judge people properly all the time."

"I nearly died because of it."

"Captain," the Doctor seemed to square his shoulders and turned around. "If I had not stimulated your latent telepathic abilities, the virus would not have been able to gain the hold that it did."

"Doctor, McCoy has already been through that with me. I would remind you that I would have died at the end of Raul's sword if it had not been for you." The Doctor's eyes studied Kirk carefully and Kirk went on, "And Doctor, you never made me do anything. And what I did by choice, I would do again." The Doctor seemed to be considering Kirk's words. Kirk wondered how many humans the Doctor had outlived.

"Well," said the Doctor, "It might have been his knife." He smiled luminously at Kirk.

"You're incorrigible." Kirk laughed.

"That's what all my teachers said."

Spock and McCoy came into the room.

"Doctor," Spock said, "We will be warping out of here in twenty-two minutes."

"Is there anything we can do for you before you go?" Kirk asked.

"For me? Oh no, the TARDIS is quite self-sustaining." He settled his hat to the back of his head.

"I don't suppose we'll meet again." McCoy interjected.

"Doctor McCoy, there is a 61.725 percent probability that the Doctor will arrive at some time in our universe."

Kirk looked at Spock in amazement and then at the Doctor. The Doctor seemed to accept the statement. "Spock - explain please."

Spock and the Doctor exchanged glances and Spock continued. "In entering and leaving the Doctor's universe, we will have created a weakness between this universe and our own. The Doctor's TARDIS utilizes the same principle as our warp drive. It is this particular use of power that enables transfer between universes. The Doctor's control of the TARDIS is not reliable."

"I like it the way it is," interrupted the Doctor indignantly.

"Indeed. You would not permit Mr. Scott to work on it. As long as it is in its present condition, there is a 61.7. . ."

"All right, Spock," Kirk said. "Doctor, do you agree with Mr. Spock's conclusion?"

"I won't dispute it, Captain."

"Then I think that there is something that I can do for you."

"Article 110, Captain?" asked Spock. Kirk smiled. His first officer was certainly reading his mind today. He looked at McCoy.

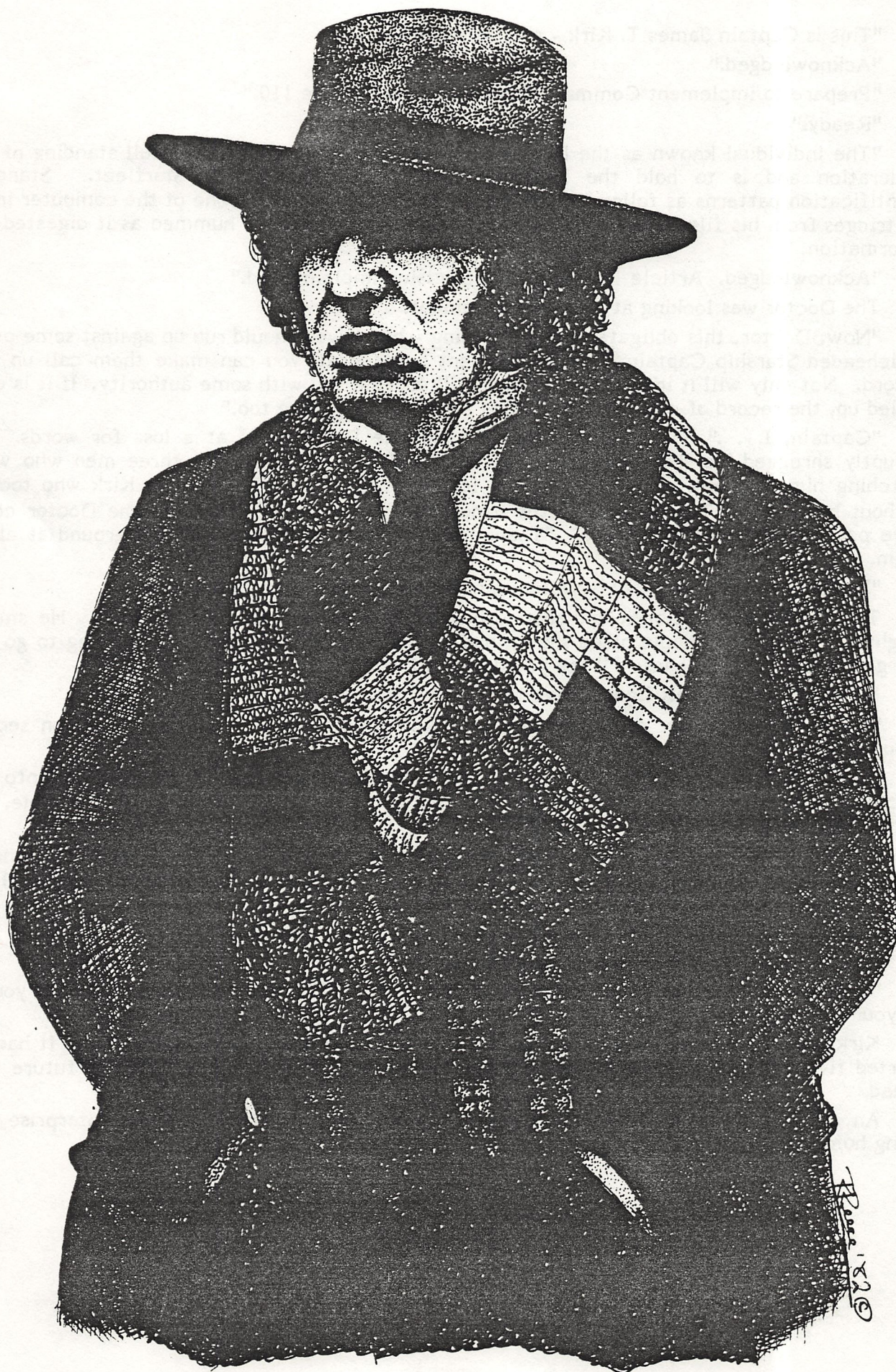
"Jim - you've never used that before."

"I never had any reason to, Bones. Don't you think that it would be an appropriate -gift?"

"Perfect." McCoy smiled as smugly as if he had had the idea himself. The Doctor looked uneasy and Kirk wondered how many times in his adventures he had ever been thanked by anyone he helped.

"Computer," Kirk said.

"Working."



"This is Captain James T. Kirk - acknowledge."

"Acknowledged."

"Prepare to implement Command Decision under Article 110."

"Ready."

"The individual known as the Doctor is to be considered a citizen in full standing of the Federation and is to hold the honorary rank of Commander in Starfleet. Standard identification patterns as follow." Kirk nodded at McCoy who took one of the computer input cartridges from his files and entered it in the slot. The computer hummed as it digested the information.

"Acknowledged. Article 110 Command Decision implemented."

The Doctor was looking at Kirk in amazement.

"Now, Doctor, this obligates you to nothing - but if you should run up against some other muleheaded Starship Captain, or a government bureaucrat, you can make them call up this record. Not only will it identify you, but it will provide you with some authority. If it is ever called up, the record of what you have done for us will be there too."

"Captain, I . . ." Kirk realized that the voluble Doctor was at a loss for words. He abruptly shrugged his shoulders and shook his head and looked at the three men who were watching him. "Thank you." He stepped forward and offered his hand to Kirk who took it without hesitation. The warmth of the handshake said more to Kirk than the Doctor could have possibly expressed in words. "Thank you," he said again and glanced around at all of them.

"Doctor," said Spock, "you have ten minutes before you have to leave."

The Doctor stepped back and settled his hat at a rakish angle on his head. He smiled brightly. "Since you people place such a high priority on saying goodbye, I'm going to go and say goodbye to Lt. Stephens. I'll see you down at the TARDIS in five minutes."

Kirk watched the tall figure leave the room with regret.

"Spock, if the Doctor does land in our Universe, what are the chances - no, on second thought, don't tell me."

"Jim," said McCoy, "You don't need Spock to figure out that if we ever run into the Doctor again either we'll be in some kind of trouble, or he'll be in some kind of trouble, but either way, we'll all wind up in trouble!"

"Doctor McCoy," said Spock, "If you are implying that the Doctor has a knack for landing in the middle of unpleasant situations. . . you are quite correct in your assumption." A slight smile curved one corner of Spock's mouth. McCoy laughed.

"Damn it, Spock, I wish we'd run into the Doctor five years ago."

Spock cocked a quizzical eyebrow at McCoy.

"Gentlemen," Kirk said, "if you want to see the TARDIS off, I would suggest that you be on your way."

Kirk watched the two leave and lay back in the bed staring up at the ceiling. It had all started five years ago, and now this time had come and there was the unknown future still ahead.

An alien sound seemed to echo through the halls and he knew that the Enterprise was going home.

THE END ?

